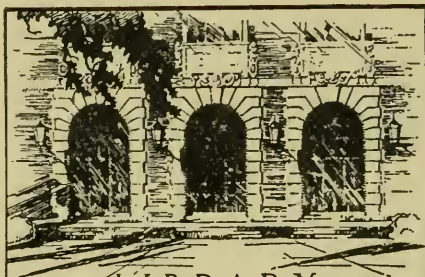


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# BEYMINSTRE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
"LENA," "KING'S COPE," "MR. WARENNE,"  
ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# BEYMINSTRE.

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## CHAPTER I.

LADY OSWESTRY never went to town by the railway; a journey of sixty or seventy miles, she said, was very endurable in your own carriage. It was very well for her lord to rush up to London through those odious tunnels, only to arrive there a few hours sooner. She had a theory that a journey, whether long or short, spoilt her day; and therefore that time was no object on these occasions. The children, with a proper *cortége* of servants, had started early in the morning; Lord Oswestry went his own way, and Regina had a tête-à-tête with her ladyship. They travelled in silence for several miles, both occupied with their



own thoughts; at last Lady Oswestry turned to her companion and said, with a little laugh, "Come, I forgive you."

"May I ask for what?" inquired Regina, laughing in her turn.

"For having been in the right, my dear; acknowledge that it is hard to bear. And now I will tell you all about it—by way of returning good for evil."

"Thank you, Lady Oswestry; I confess I am very anxious to hear all I can of Edith."

"I hope you appreciated my lord walking off with Henry in that sublime fashion, out of our hearing. I need not say that I slipped into the conservatory, knowing that they would go on to my morning room, which was the nearest one they could find. Well, as you thought, my worthy cousin gave the little goose reason to believe that he meant to marry her—a different idea never crossed her limited understanding; so, after playing upon her feelings in every possible way, trying neglect and fondness, and indifference and fervour—the old routine, in short—she allowed

herself to be carried off to the railway station in a fly. Now we none of us know what we may be brought to, and therefore we had better not boast; but, rather than elope in a *fly*—I do think I would die an old maid! I do, really!”

“Well! Lady Oswestry!”

“Well! they went of course to London—he meant to take her into Wales, I think he said; but first of all, as it was growing late, he began to recollect that was time for dinner. So they went into the railway hotel, and, while dinner was getting ready, my friend thought he could not do better than explain the relations which he intended to preserve in their future intercourse; threw himself at her feet; cried, I dare say (he is very clever at crying); laid all the blame on his father; and implored her to have mercy on a miserable wretch whose love was the cause of his fault—or words to that effect.”

“And Edith?”

“Well, my dear, I’m so pleased with her, I could really embrace her if she were within reach. It seems that she made no scene; she said that

he had taken her by surprise ; that he must allow her a few moments to collect her ideas, and begged him to leave her for a little while to herself. He reminded her (so like a man) that the step she had taken already had tarnished her character in the eyes of the world ; she said she knew it ; and he left the room—went and smoked a cigar, I dare say. When he came back Edith was gone ; all his inquiries in the hotel were quite useless ; nobody had remarked her, no one knew or cared whether she went or stayed. So, then, fearing that she had wandered out in the streets, and might lose her way or get into mischief, (so considerate !) he furnished himself with a detector don't they call it?—at the police station, and off the two set all over town all night. I hope they liked it—especially Henry, who, you know, is indolence personified. Well, finding all their researches come to nothing, Henry thought it just possible she might have found her way back to Piermont, so he took the train, and burst in upon us as you saw. I promise you my lord spoke his mind to Henry, in his having interfered with a

person under his roof, which you know was so very rude; but Henry was so sorry, and said so many fine things, that they shook hands, and now you will see him in town as much with us, I dare say, as usual."

"What a pleasure!" thought Regina.

"The first thing I do, to-morrow, will be to inquire among my friends for an ugly governess—a perfect treasure, of course, but frightful as a Burmese idol—and one who cannot sing a note; depend upon it, my dear, that singing is a very dangerous weapon. Little Carleton did not know how to make use of it; but certainly her voice was delicious. Even Henry, who cares nothing for music, used to be quite affected. Poor, little, stupid, ignorant moth—it is all over with her! For who will take her after this?"

"I will, Lady Oswestry," said Regina, quietly. "As soon as I am of age I shall want a companion, and, till then, something can be arranged, I have no doubt."

"But, my dear child, you can't go and live alone with a little girl like Edith, and one



whose past life won't bear investigation ! They will cast up that unlucky little trip against her as long as she lives. But it does not signify—you will be married, or at least engaged, before June."

Regina did feel very angry. Lady Oswestry's carelessness had first occasioned the acquaintance, her own near relation had caused the mischief, and yet she gave up the poor girl to ruin without a thought of doing any thing for her.

"Then you think, Lady Oswestry, that Miss Carleton's future prospects are quite destroyed?"

"Utterly, my dear!" she replied, letting down a little bit more of the window.

"Through Lord Henry?"

"No doubt!"

"Then do you not think it belongs to him to repair the evil he has done?"

"My dear! people who have no money can do nothing—their hands are tied."

"They can do harm, it seems."

"Yes! but it is so much more easy to do harm than to do good."

“Don’t you think he ought to marry her? and, if he has no money—which I can’t understand—work hard to support her?”

Lady Oswestry instead of laughing, for a wonder, looked with some curiosity into Regina’s face.

“I suppose, my dear, he ought,” she said; “but you will wait a long time if you wait for Henry Montresor to do what he ought.”

Regina did not wait. As soon as they arrived in town she wrote off a note to Becky Halliday, her old servant, to tell her that, if a young lady were to present herself at Holmwood, she desired that Becky would show her every attention.

Edith was an instance, not so rare as some people think, of a gentle yielding nature possessing great powers of action in emergencies. A clear but limited understanding will act to the purpose; while a mind more fertile in resources, will weigh, and hesitate, and fail at last. The moment that Lord Henry told her (in very fine language no doubt) that he could not marry her, she felt as if she had been stabbed to the heart; but she felt,

too, that it was not a time to give way to weakness—to the first agony of the blow succeeded a terrible fear that he would not allow her to leave him. She, therefore, begged that he would give her a few minutes alone, and in that time she arranged her plans. She had, fortunately, a few guineas in her purse. She had often been to London for the day, when she lived with her relations at Kensington; the streets, therefore, did not frighten her even by gas-light, when she knew where to go. She walked for some distance before she took a coach, for she had a dread of being traced; then she ordered the driver to go to the coach-office in Piccadilly—she knew that the Bradford stages started from that place. To get to Holmwood, to claim the hospitality that Regina had offered, that was her one idea—half fearful that it would be withdrawn now that she had allowed her name to be so terribly compromised. She was just in time for the evening coach, and at ten o'clock at night, with whirling brain and trembling limbs, she was set down at the door of the old brick house. By that time

she could hardly speak; and when Becky and Mariane ran out, half scared, to see "what the coach could want with them at that time of night," they were only just in time to save their unexpected visiter from falling to the ground. Edith murmured something about Miss Howard and Piermont, and that was quite enough for Becky. She despatched Mariane to get a bed ready, while she made some tea for the poor girl, and helped her kindly to undress. The next day Edith was worse, and Becky wrote off to her young mistress. Regina was very much distressed, she wished extremely to go and see Edith; but she had scarcely seen Lord Oswestry since they arrived in town, and she did not like to ask his lady's advice. She did not wish Lord Henry to know where Edith was; and, if she told Lady Oswestry, she felt sure the news would find its way round to him.

But, a day or two after she had received the letter, she was standing in the little well-filled green-house at the top of the stairs, opposite the drawing-room door, feeling very melancholy, and



very much like a prisoner, and idly pulling some dead leaves from a geranium, when Lord Oswestry, who was passing down-stairs, put his head in to see who was there.

"Oh, Lord Oswestry!" she cried, "I do so want to speak to you."

"I am at your orders," he said, with a smile; "why, how forlorn you look!"

"I wish, if you please, to go to Holmwood for a day or two; I have a letter from my old servant, and she is in a little trouble, a little difficulty—she would like to consult me—and it's a long time since I have seen her."

"Certainly! nothing easier! you are in no great hurry, I suppose."

"Why, it is rather pressing—you look so incredulous; but can you not imagine that things may be out of order in a little tiny establishment, and that poor old Becky would be beyond her wits much sooner than your steward, Mr. Stapleton?"

"Come! what is it? The pump wants mending—or the lock on the back-door is broken! Can-

not you write? You see I am unwilling to spare you—you are so important.”

“But only for a day or two.”

“You must have your own way; how do you mean to go?”

“Hire a clarence, and leave Flimsey here, if you will allow me—she would frighten poor Becky.”

“That’s well! Flimsey shall be your hostage. But I half suspect you of wanting to run away altogether. You are out of harmony with our modern existence, which is almost vulgar, there’s so much glare in it—you are misplaced except among woods and terraced gardens, like Chaucer’s Emilia.”

“To-morrow, then?”

“To-morrow, if you please. By the way, Henry Montresor is in the drawing-room.”

“Here?”

He laughed a little at her look of indignation; and at the same moment Lady Oswestry and her cousin came out on the landing.

“We are going to look for some luncheon,”

said her ladyship; "will you come, too, my dear?"

Lord Oswestry, who had begun to go downstairs, came back a step or two to offer his arm to Regina, and just saved her from Lord Henry, who was pressing forward to lead her down.

"How is it that I have not seen you this age?" asked Lord Henry, as they took their places at table. "Where have you hid yourself?"

Regina looked at Lord Henry, not knowing what he meant—for she had seen him perfectly two days back, when he burst in upon them in such a singular manner, and it was not by her own wish that she ever saw him again.

Lady Oswestry burst out laughing—"Oh! the tell-tale countenance!" she said; "it expresses so distinctly that you could well have put off this happy meeting a little longer!"

"I hope not!" said Lord Henry in his most touching manner.

"Ah! I forgot I had something for you," added her ladyship, opening her little *escarcelle* of green morocco, embroidered with gold thread, and taking

from it a common visiting card, on which was printed the name, *Earl of Ellesdon*: “that was left yesterday, on your account, I have no doubt. He dines here on Saturday; quite time enough for you to order a new dinner dress, my dear—white moire, I venture to hint.”

Regina half laughed, and threw the card from her upon the table.

“Saturday!” said Lord Oswestry; “then you must make haste back—we cannot spare you on that occasion.”

“Spare her! where is she going, in the name of goodness?”

“Miss Howard has had a summons to Holmwood,” said Lord Oswestry; “her time is not always her own, like other people’s. Riches bring cares and duties with them. So, to-morrow and next day, we must make the best of her absence.”

Regina felt that Lord Henry was looking earnestly at her; she turned to Lady Oswestry.

“My old servant makes the most of any little difficulty—and, in this case, I believe she does so

that she may have the pleasure of seeing me again."

"Oh, my dear! I know what old servants are! I have a horror of them! However, you *will* come back by Saturday."

"I will, indeed, Lady Oswestry."

"The duke and duchess come to town the week after next—you know who I mean—Lord Ellesdon's papa and mama. I hope you will like them. It is important to *you*, you know. As for the duchess she is so *very* respectable, she rather bores *me*!"

Regina thought that would be rather a recommendation.

"But Miss Howard is surely not going alone?" inquired Lord Henry.

"All the way to Holmwood," added Regina, rather scornfully.

"No—why should she?" said Lady Oswestry; "why not give us a *fête champêtre* at your cottage, and introduce us to the treasure of a servant. And to-morrow I have not, as it happens, a single thing to do."

"Besides the opportunity it would afford us of



calling upon Miss Hopper, whose absence I have so often lamented," rejoined Lord Henry.

"This would be a climax! Lady Oswestry and her cousin in the same house with Edith!" she looked imploringly at Lord Oswestry.

"I would not do any thing of the kind, Miss Howard, if I were you," he said, rising to leave the room; "I would give no *fête* until I could give one at Beyminstre."

"I will take your advice, Lord Oswestry."

"What a screw!" cried her ladyship. "You going, Henry? what do you mean to do?"

"The old story."

"Fancy Henry wandering about with his policeman!" exclaimed Lady Oswestry, turning to Regina—"but I forgot, we must not talk of these things before young ladies."

Regina would have slipped out of the room, but Lady Oswestry passed her hand through her arm and detained her.

"Well, good-by, Violet!" said Lord Henry.  
"Good-morning, Miss Howard!"

"Farewell!" replied his cousin. "Poor Henry!

does he not look as if he were going to the Tower? He is in such a state of mind, my love; he can hear nothing of the little Carleton; and it would shock you too much if I were only to tell you the dangers which pretty girls run if they lose themselves in this Christian metropolis. I assure you it is no fiction, that girls of respectable family coming off a journey, and not met by their friends at the steamboat or coach office, are often trepanned, and nothing more heard of them."

"It is very dreadful, Lady Oswestry; but in what would this interest Lord Henry? Edith cannot be more degraded—come what may—than she would have been had she listened to him."

"Oh! my dear, you don't know—there are degrees; do you know I really think he is very fond of little Carleton! He looks wretchedly, and goes wandering about from morning till night, hoping he may discover her before it is too late. He had a faint hope that you might have heard something about her, but I said I was sure you would have told me, you are so good-natured."

"I ought not to speak ill of your cousin, Lady

Oswestry; but I must say *his* anxieties are the last I should wish to relieve. I trust that I may yet have good news of Edith; but, if I do, I shall be in no hurry to communicate them to Lord Henry."

"It is a good sign for Henry if he has piqued you by this escapade."

"Not if I know myself—but I think he has acted like a coward! I suppose one may despise a baseness without any personal feeling in the case."

"Ah! my dear, you have been brought up in the country—you take every thing too seriously. Men will be men! But the carriage will be round in five minutes, and I am dying to take you to Vouillot and Laure."

After a round of shopping they returned; the carriage loaded with parcels of all shapes and sizes, light and heavy, with which Regina gladdened the heart of Mrs. Flimsey. The next morning she set off for Holmwood. Becky was delighted to see her, but she gave her a very poor account of her young guest.

“She don’t eat, miss—and I think she don’t sleep; and she sits all day in the chair by the chimney-corner, and never speaks a word.”

Regina hurried up-stairs into the drawing-room, and saw a little shrunken yellow woman lying back in the easy-chair—she had to pause a moment before she could be quite sure it was Edith.

Their meeting was very affectionate. Regina would not talk of the past; she put that off, she said, till her friend was stronger.

“I have heard how it all happened, dear Edith!” she said; “I was sure you would act so. Now my plan is, that you stay quietly here till I am of age, and then that we go to the Lakes for the summer and autumn. Afterwards, we will form fresh plans. But the first thing I do is to send off for the doctor.”

His report was not very encouraging. He felt Edith’s pulse, and looked at her face, several times during his visit. He said her nerves must have received a great shock; and, when he followed Regina out of the room, asked her age, and inquired of what complaint her mother had died.

“I do not quite know (the doctor was a very old family friend), but Mrs. Carleton was one of the wives of Mr. Morley, our late rector; and therefore I never attributed her death to any other cause; but I can find out, if you like.”

“I wish you would—I don’t like her manner of breathing. Give her plenty of nourishment, and keep up her spirits.”

“I will, if you will tell me how.”

The doctor stood and mused a little while.

“Why, I’ll tell you one thing which you *can* do; and that is, don’t suffer her to have any anxieties of a pecuniary kind. Romantic young ladies are apt to sneer at these sorts of troubles, but they undermine the constitution more than you would imagine.”

“That I will take care to prevent; but in spite of your taunt, I, who am not a romantic young lady, can assure you that there are sorrows deeper than those of the purse, and that even money cannot cure.”

“Oh! if there’s any love in the case, I wash my hands of it,” cried the doctor impetuously. “You



need not tell *me* that's past cure! What evil spirit possesses the woman, I know not; but that folly will counterfeit, I do believe, every disease under heaven! Why, I have had a young woman often and often under my care for months together, and thought she would die every week! And, after all, she would turn round and get well, and the mother would say, 'Oh, sir! that was a love affair—that was!' If that poor simpleton up-stairs is in love, out with it—let us know the worst! And then she may breathe as she likes, and cough as she likes, and have a stitch in her side, or a dozen—I don't care!"

"Well, doctor," said Regina, amused at his vehemence, "I hope she is not; but there's no crime in it; and she has had a very severe trial, though I don't feel at liberty to tell you exactly of what nature."

"I am sure I don't want to know," said the doctor; "*you* are looking very well, I am glad to see, and I hope you will keep so. Good-by!"

Regina stole a few hours from Edith to pay the Winters a visit, and on her return she met Mr.

Brand walking across the common with Winny Hopper. He was as much surprised as pleased to see her again, and Winny made many inquiries about the dear countess, which, considering the terms on which they had parted, struck Regina as rather audacious.

“I should be so much obliged if you would pay me a short visit some time to-day, Mr. Brand—if Miss Hopper will not be jealous,” said Regina.

“Ask me, too, Regina,” cried Winny; “I have so much to talk to you about.”

“I am very sorry, but my interview with Mr. Brand must be strictly confidential,” replied Regina gravely; “another time I shall hope to see you both together.”

In fact, one reason why she wished to have a little conversation with him was to tell him the outline of Miss Carleton’s history, and to beg that he would, if possible, prevent Miss Hopper from intruding upon her, and persecuting her with inquisitive conversation.

He readily promised to do every thing in his

power to avert Winny's suspicions from Regina's guest; and expressed great commiseration for Edith's history.

"And what have you done about Beyminstre?" he asked.

Regina coloured crimson.

"Have you thought better of it? and determined to maintain what is certainly your right?"

"No! but I feel shy at opening the subject with Lord Oswestry. I am among people who would hardly understand me; and he would think—it would seem to him——" she grew more and more confused.

"We are almost in May," remarked Mr. Brand.

"Yes! I have but little time to lose. I shall grow brave when there is no help for it. And when I want to consult your brother, will you give me a letter to him?"

"Certainly! as soon as you have spoken to your guardian."

"And will you allow me to ask you to stand by Miss Carleton in any difficulty she may meet with

here—if, for instance, that worthless man should follow her to Holmwood ? ”

“ I shall be glad to serve her in any way.”

She was very sorry to leave Edith, but she was pledged to return, and she could only arrange every thing for her comfort and protection.

“ Till June, dear Edith ! ” she said, when her clearance was announced—“ and then what a delightful tour we will have together.”

Edith tried to smile as she hung round her neck.

“ Does he know that I am here ? ” she whispered.

“ No, you do not wish him to be told ? ”

“ No, and yet—he will be so very wretched ! ” and her tears began to fall.

“ I am afraid, if he learns where you are, he will try to see you.”

A half smile appeared through the tears. “ I should like very much that he was told I was safe, and kindly cared for—though we shall never meet again.”

“ The next time I am able to speak to him, I

will give him your message—I may say, you never *wish* to meet again?”

Her “yes” was scarcely audible.

“Decidedly I have never been in love!” thought Regina, as she leaned back in her carriage: “all this is quite beyond me. I am sure that, in her place, I should feel nothing but contempt and anger for the man—

‘Where I find worth,  
I love the owner till he let it go,  
And then I follow it!’

“That is just my confession of faith in such matters—instead of musing and brooding over an image of my own fancy, as women do. I dare say it is very unamiable to open one’s eyes and see clear—but it is my way. I wonder, just as a matter of curiosity, what Sir Alban’s ideas are on this important subject! It would be quite fresh and edifying to get at his notions upon any topic—he is so horribly reserved. I wish I knew how to begin about Beyminstre to Lord Oswestry; he will look so astonished—and then I shall grow nervous; and sometimes I have felt afraid he



suspected something about Alban and me. I have seen his glance fall with that peculiar distinct regard upon us alternately, once or twice, as if he knew we were not friends. Can Alban have told him? No—I am sure he would never have a confidant, and, above all, now that those feelings are over with us both. What will he say when the titles of the estate are put in his hands? I should like to see him. I wonder how he will live at Beyminstre? What he will do? Whom he will marry?—Good gracious! I am almost as foolish as Edith; it is well that here are the lights of London shining in the distance, to change the current of my thoughts. Now, has Lady Oswestry thought of ordering my moire dress for to-morrow, I wonder?”

## CHAPTER II.

“I MAY have my faults,” said Lady Oswestry, as she was sitting with Regina over her dressing-room fire; “I hope, I am sure, that I have, since I devoutly hate perfect people; but I am not quite come to such a pass as to forget your moire dress. You cannot fail to admire it, and I want you to look very dazzling, because Lord Ellesdon will be accompanied by his venerable mother. I rather think she suspects he has an object, and she runs up to town to form her opinion on his choice. I immediately flew to call upon her, and entreat her to dine here; and the readiness with which she accepted, considerably enlightened me upon her motives. Well! you are worth looking at.”

“Is she very old?” asked Regina, laughing.

“No, my dear—not very old; but she is a learned lady, and does not exactly suit me.”

“Is she fierce?”

“No, not fierce; but so wonderfully well-informed she takes my breath away.”

“Lord Ellesdon ought to be something more than he is, with such a superior mother.”

“Oh, my dear! he has all the talents and all the virtues—only he is so dull; but you have wit enough for both—and he is not bad-looking.”

“Do you think, Lady Oswestry, seriously, that I wish to make a conquest of Lord Ellesdon?”

“I am afraid not, you perverse creature! I would give something to know who it is that makes you so inflexible! But there is the dressing-bell—To arms!”

Regina was standing on the hearth-rug, talking to Lord Oswestry, before dinner, the opal lights gleaming on her white moire dress, and one slender foot, in its white kid bottine, resting on the corner of the fender, when the Duchess of Clareville and her son were announced. She

slipped into a low chair, a little in the background, hoping to pass unnoticed, and to reconnoitre the formidable duchess at her leisure; but Lady Oswestry lost no time in advancing towards her, saying, "Let me present Miss Howard to your grace;" and she had to rise and bow, and to receive the greeting of Lord Ellesdon, before she could glide into obscurity again.

The duchess was rather tall, with a fine figure and a still beautiful complexion; her fair hair, between the lights, seemed hardly touched with grey. She had a sweet maternal countenance, such as the less ideal of the Italian painters are fond of giving to the Virgin. She wore a small three-cornered handkerchief of point lace at the back of her head, fastened with turquoise-headed gold pins, and a large point shawl enveloped her almost from head to foot, and softened the tint of her blue silk gown. To Regina's surprise, her grace took the chair next her, and said in a delightful voice, that charmed her at once:—

"This is your first season in town, Miss Howard?"

“It is—but I ought to tell your grace that I am a very old *débutante*.”

“I know you are a minor,” said the duchess, “and I hear that you have very lately succeeded to this large property.”

“Nearly three years ago,” said Regina, with a sigh.

“Then you are doubtless by this time weary of congratulations.”

“I have not received many: but they would be very much misplaced in my case. The bequest has been a source of the greatest annoyance to me, ever since I first heard of it.”

“Indeed! Have the relatives disputed the will?”

“Oh, no! but grandmama thought with me, that it was right to make over the property to the heir-at-law, and there were so many difficulties in the way,” said Regina, wondering at her own frankness, which seemed drawn out by something gentle and cordial in the manner of the duchess.

“And now?”

“Yes! I shall go on trying—that is, as soon as I have consulted my guardian.”



“I hardly know whether it is a friendly wish to hope that you will succeed?”

“I should think it very friendly; for of what use is so much money to a single woman, brought up in retirement?”

“But I imagine that Miss Howard will not always be a single woman?”

“It is very odd!” said Regina, naturally. “Nobody seems to think I can be in earnest; but surely there are found now and then some women who do not wish to marry, especially when they are old enough to reflect—it is only strange to me there are not more.”

“I could answer you,” said the duchess, graciously, “in the words of Viola to Olivia;” and she rose as she said so, for Lord Oswestry came to lead her down to dinner.

Regina was very glad to have had this little conversation with the duchess, for—though it was very likely that Lord Ellesdon had no thoughts of her—if he had, it would put him on his guard; and, if he had not, it would pretty clearly show that she had no designs upon *him*.

Lord Ellesdon took pains to say a few words to her in the evening—a few *last* words, she thought, with some amusement. He asked her if she was pleased with the change from Piermont to Portman-square? and she replied, “Yes, while the cold winds lasted she did not regret the country—she knew how the flower-beds were looking, all withered up for want of rain.”

“Was she fond of gardening?” he asked.

“Yes! lazily fond of it—very fond of seeing others work.”

“Young ladies were generally fond of a garden in that way,” Lord Ellesdon thought.

The duchess was close to them, and Regina, turning to her, exclaimed in her odd manner—“Madam! Lord Ellesdon calls me a young lady.”

“What a libel!” said the duchess, laughing.

Lord Ellesdon looked at her as you might look at the wheels of a clock—with a kind of puzzled curiosity.

“I have a favour to ask of you, Miss Howard, *already*,” said the duchess. “I mean to give a fancy ball in the course of a few weeks, and I have

a desire to open it by a Pavin danced in costume—will you be one of the twelve *young ladies* who will be wanted for the figure?”

“I should feel myself highly honoured,” answered Regina; “but I know nothing of the dance.”

“I have engaged a ballet-master to teach the figure at my house,” said the duchess; “our lessons begin next week—say you will make one of the pupils, dear Miss Howard!”

There was something so sweet in her manner, that Regina was quite won.

“Willingly!” she replied; “if your grace will permit me to make one condition.”

Her face was suffused, and she hesitated a little.

“Any thing you like,” said her grace; “I shall be truly glad to retain you on your own terms.”

“Then I shall be obliged to you to find me the most unconsidered little individual for a partner—if any obscure person is admitted to your ball; for I hope and think that I have not the claim to consideration that is at present supposed; and

people would regret afterwards that they had distinguished me under false pretences."

Lord Ellesdon's countenance became rather more enlightened. The duchess exchanged a glance with him, expressive of satisfaction.

"I would not take the liberty of paying you a compliment, Miss Howard," she said; "but you must allow me to say, as a general remark, that beauty is, quite as much as wealth, a passport to these things in our best society."

"And, let me add," said Lord Ellesdon plainly, "that if Miss Howard will do me the honour to accept me as her partner, I will dance the Pavin; and if not—not."

"I hope Miss Howard will yield to that declaration in the style of the Spanish juntas, *Se no, no!*" said the duchess, laughing.

"I can do no less," answered Regina, satisfied with having explained to the duchess the insecurity of her prospects, and glad at least that Lord Ellesdon would save her from a disagreeable partner.

The guests were dispersing—as they do at a

London dinner—directly they have drunk a cup of tea.

“We are going to the opera,” said the duchess.

“And so are we,” replied Regina; “and it will be half over.”

“In another season, Miss Howard,” said Lord Ellesdon, “you will be glad to escape half of an old story.”

“I shall like to see all or none, I think,” she insisted; “it is hardly fair to the artistes to come in cold, in the middle of their impersonation, when they are wrought up to the occasion.”

“You must promise to accompany me some evening,” said the duchess, “when the gentlemen dine out, and we are able to be in time for the overture.”

“Now!” said Lady Oswestry, stepping daintily over the cocoa-nut matting, unrolled between her door and her carriage; “now, my dear, you may be Lady Ellesdon as soon as you please—the duchess approves of you.”

Regina laughed, and said she thought Lord Ellesdon might as well be a little consulted.



“My dear, whatever the duchess wishes—he wishes; besides, with those people, marriage is always rather a duty than a pleasure.”

“Thank you, Lady Oswestry! If I had any lingering ambition to be a duchess, that little bit of candour would decide me; but I think the present duchess charming!”

“She was a great beauty once, my dear; but now she is turned blue. She is going to-morrow to the Literary Institution, to hear a horrid man in spectacles lecture on geology. It is a sad thing to grow old,” added her ladyship, playing with her fan; “but there is no need to make matters worse by growing blue.”

Lord Henry was at the door to help them out, and he accompanied them to his cousin's box, which was a remarkably good one, and of which he condescended to make use pretty often. He pretended, as usual, to be on very familiar terms with Regina, and as nearly as possible spoiled her pleasure in the last act of *Norma*. Once, when he had been pressing upon her the use of his immense glasses, which made her head ache and

tired her arm, she said, as she returned them to him—"I have been desired, Lord Henry, to give you a message from a person——"

"Yes! I understand," he said, drawing closer to her.

"She told me to say that she was safe, and well cared for, and that she never desired to see you again."

"Thank you!" he replied, but he did not seem very much concerned by the intelligence; and, turning to his cousin, he asked, "Where was my lord?"

"At the house—where he lives, I think," returned Lady Oswestry; "we see little enough of him—don't we, Regina? Unless he is behind the scenes, which is very possible."

Lord Henry laughed, and Regina coloured and felt pained.

"I wonder," said Lord Henry, as he was helping Regina to put on her white cloak after the *Ballet*, "whether, by any chance, I shall see you to-morrow, if I come to luncheon?"

“Most likely,” she answered; “because that is a meal which I never neglect.”

And she half hoped that he might have just so much decency left, to wish to find out from her a little more about Edith Carleton and her prospects, which he must know he had so cruelly injured.

But Lord Henry had no such intention. As soon as he arrived at his chambers in the Albany, he wrote the following affectionate letter to his friend Winny:—

“DEAR MISS HOPPER,—I trust that you have not quite forgotten those delightful days, of which I retain so vivid a remembrance, which we passed together at Piermont. If I could hope that I should not be quite unwelcome, it would give me much pleasure to run down to Holmwood some morning, to talk over old times with you. By the way, I rather think the pretty little governess, Miss Carleton, is somewhere in your neighbourhood. If you have chanced to meet her, perhaps you will have the goodness to let me know; for Miss

Howard is rather anxious to learn how she is going on.—Yours faithfully,

“HENRY MONTRESOR.”

To describe the capering and prancing which took possession of Winny—like an attack of St. Vitus’s dance—when she received this billet, would be impossible to those persons who are so unhappy as not to know her. She was so exalted that she would hardly answer Mr. Brand at the school, and snapped at the mistress, who simply asked her whether she had any stockings to mend, as the third class wanted work. Her clogs cut the polka step all the way home, while her eyes were hardly visible, so beaming were her smiles. By return of post she had despatched the following reply, with a sealing-wax kiss outside:—

“DEAR LORD HENRY,

“Dear friend,—Truly shall I rejoice to see you in my cottage abode at Holmwood. Mama, who is lame and weak, need not prevent you from hastening to see one who sincerely longs to behold

you again. Much, I hope, you have pondered over *Tractarian Errors* since we met. I have a sweet tract, which I would send, but that I fear it is over-weight. The young person you inquire about is established in Miss Howard's own cottage here, and therefore her anxiety is all a *pretence*; but Regina was always *sly*! I much fear Miss Carleton is not open. She has more than once declined seeing *me*, but Mr. Brand has called *twice*! Fain would I write more, but I trust soon to meet—Do not delay to visit your faithful friend,

“WINNIFRED F. HOPPER.”

These precious lines had not yet arrived to gladden the eyes of Lord Henry, when he reached Portman-square the next day.

Lady Oswestry was alone.

“What is this about Miss Howard?” he asked. “Has that meddling duchess engaged her to dance in her shew. On my word, I would as soon a woman figured before a booth at a fair as in one of these fancy quadrilles!”

“Henry turned prude!” laughed Lady Os-



westry; "but, seriously, I would rather Regina married Lord Ellesdon than you."

"Thank you! I mean to ask her, though—unless you think she is too much shocked by that foolish affair with the little Carleton."

"I do not believe she likes you less than she did. You never had any chance; you went to work the wrong way."

"So you think: after all, I have just a chance—I had better speak now, than wait till all these good matches come forward."

Regina came in just as they were sitting down to table. She bowed to Lord Henry, but took no farther notice of him, and ate something near her, as if in haste to be gone as soon as she could. Lady Oswestry tried to bring her into the conversation; she answered her, but relapsed into silence at once. In fact, she was thinking of her own affairs, and was not in the least occupied with Lord Henry.

"You had something of a fright coming home last night," said Lord Henry, determined to make her talk.

“ Our wheel caught in another carriage,” she said.

“ Were you much alarmed ?”

“ No ! it was over in a minute.”

“ Lord Ellesdon heard of it, somehow or other,” said Lady Oswestry ; “ for he called at the door to inquire after us before you were awake this morning.”

“ A charming person, Lord Ellesdon !” said Lord Henry.

“ Very well behaved,” said Regina.

Lady Oswestry laughed ironically—and Regina remembered that, in one sense, Lord Henry could not be said to be well behaved.

“ I wish you would let me give you some strawberries,” asked Lady Oswestry.

“ I have done, thank you,” answered Regina, as she rose from table with a handful of little biscuits ; “ I suppose I may give these to the dogs, Lady Oswestry ?”

“ What ! do you patronise those detestable spaniels, Miss Howard ?” exclaimed Lord Henry.

Regina did not hear him ; she piled up the

biscuits in the palm of her hand, and walked out of the room.

“What is it? Pique?” he asked, turning to Lady Oswestry.

“It looks like it,” returned her ladyship rising.

“Shall I speak at once, then, or wait?”

“Take your own way; but I repeat to you, for your comfort, if she sees the affair in the light of an arrangement, you may succeed, but not unless.”

Regina was in the drawing-room, sitting on a low footstool, with the three spaniels on their hind legs begging. She turned her beautiful head as Lord Henry approached her, expecting to see him followed by Lady Oswestry.

He took the corner of the sofa that overlooked, as it were, her position; and, bending towards her with any thing but the manner of a lover, he said, “Miss Howard, may I beg the favour of a few minutes’ conversation with you?”

“A few minutes by all means,” she replied; “but I am expecting the carriage directly—we are going to Holmes’s about a shawl.”

“A very short time is all I desire,” he continued;

“a very few minutes will be sufficient to let me know what I have to hope or fear.”

She looked up, threw the fragments hastily to the dogs, and took a chair (which, by the way, he did not offer her) directly opposite to him.

“Miss Howard—I believe most men would begin what they had to say with a tribute to your beauty and merit, of which, however, no one is more sensible than myself—but——”

• “Oh, yes! ‘pass that,’ as Olivia says; come to your speech,” answered Regina, with a smile; “besides, that has nothing whatever to do with your present business.” For she naturally thought he meant to send Edith some message through her, in answer to the one she had given him.

“I convey the highest tribute to your sense and temper in speaking so plainly. I am past the age, Miss Howard, for romantic attachment—moreover, I can’t afford it. If I marry, I must strike a bargain! After this, if I said that I adored you, I could not expect you to believe me; and yet, perhaps, it would be nearer the truth in my case than in that of half your other suitors. The

question now between us is this. Do you think my name, my position in the world, worth your purchase? I have been led to hope that you may."

"Not by me?" inquired Regina, anxiously.

"No—by some mutual friends."

"That is well. I thought *I* could hardly be accused of making advances. I thought it was almost impossible for any one, without positive affectation, to creep more constantly into the background than I have done. And I thought (pardon me), from the first evening that I was in your company, that you, a gentleman, had given a gentlewoman to understand that you wished to become her husband; and I should as soon have expected an offer from my Lord Oswestry, or from your father, the Marquis of Shields."

"Indeed, Miss Howard, you quite mistake the nature of my sentiments with respect to——"

"I did mistake them, and so did she! I did not then know that a man in your station could say one thing and mean another: more than say it—imply it with looks, actions, every thing! I did

*This is the great defect of the book. It is*  
*... ..*

not know that a gentleman could act towards a young woman who stood alone in the world, as he would not dare to do if her father (like Edith Carleton's) had not died for his country, and left her defenceless! Next time you attack the fame of an honest woman, have a little shame, a little vestige of honour, and set your mark on one who has a father to shoot you, or a brother to trample you down on the high-road; and not this cowardly, safe, easy triumph!"

"You are warm, Miss Howard," said Lord Henry; "you see my folly in a strong point of view. May I not hope that, when your anger has a little cooled, you will look with a more favourable eye upon my pretensions? (My brother, Lord Pentland, has but one boy--and he is very subject to fits."

Regina could scarcely help laughing at the sudden turn he gave the conversation. She was vexed at her warmth—not because she thought it greater than the occasion required, but because she felt it was a pity to throw away any real emotion on such a poor creature.



"Lord Henry," she said, "long before my anger has abated, I believe, and hope I shall be, if I live, a very poor speculation indeed. And then, I think, my opinion of your conduct will give you little or no concern."

"I do believe, Miss Howard," he returned, "that you consider me incapable of any one good feeling."

And he did not seem very much offended either; for people must have some value for goodness before they are very greatly shocked at being thought bad, and Lord Henry dearly loved to talk about himself; and, as this was an enjoyment he could seldom partake of among men, he made up for it whenever a woman could be found to listen to him.

"The fatal circumstances that surround a younger son in this country," he went on, "early destroy all that is noble and ingenuous in the character, and compel us to that heartless line of conduct which I deplore, and would gladly see altered."

"Ah! that is all translated from some French novel," thought Regina. "I know it is French,

because of that word 'fatal'—which English writers use only when they are going to talk of a death. At any rate, Lord Henry," she said, more civilly, "if I do think ill of you, you think just as badly of yourself. Now, as I shall very soon disappear from *your* world, I may be allowed to act in one respect like a person who has not long to live, and I will therefore permit myself to offer you a little scrap of advice—tilting with wind-mills," she added with a sad smile.

"Most happy, I am sure," murmured Lord Henry.

"The only chance for your becoming any better than you are—and you seem to agree with me, that there is room for improvement—is, to marry Edith Carleton. Though I hope, I am sure, she would not have you."

Lord Henry started.

"As to your saying you are too old to love, you got that idea out of your French novel, along with the fine speech you said just now. It may be true of Frenchmen, but I am sure it is not true of Englishmen. Nobody is too *old*, but a

great many people are too *bad*, to love what is beautiful and good! You love her as much as you can any body—which is not enormously. But—I can't think what brings Don Quixote into my mind; not *you*, certainly—honest Sancho would say that half a loaf is better than no bread, and, if you can only love a little, even that little might save you from becoming like those awful old men in the club windows, who seem to me to want a missionary excessively. But you won't; nobody takes advice—nobody does what they are bid. You will go begging from year to year, until you find a rich woman to accept you, and bring discord and misery into your home."

"And why, Miss Howard, should not a rich woman love me as well as a poor one?"

"Because you will not love her—and no woman can bear that long, however she may begin."

Lord Henry would gladly have sat there talking about himself till night; but she rose with a slight smile, a graceful bow, and moved to the door, saying something as she went about looking for Lady Oswestry.

## CHAPTER III.

Now that Regina had dropped a hint to a comparative stranger of her intentions with respect to Beyminstre, she felt that, in common propriety, she could no longer delay speaking to her guardian. Besides, the time was drawing on; she wanted only a month to coming of age.

She made up her mind to take the first opportunity to ask for an interview, but Lord Oswestry was full of business; it happened that some question then before the house interested him particularly—he was on a committee—always going out immediately after breakfast, and seldom appearing again until the next day; and at breakfast, what with his reading the papers, and Lady Oswestry talking about the people they must invite, and the parties they were going to, Regina felt that it

would be a very difficult matter to glide in her request for an audience.

“So you are fixed to wear blue and silver brocade,” said Lady Oswestry; “it’s a pity; rose and silver is so much more becoming, and lights up so well.”

“But Miss St. Clair, the duchess’s niece, wears pink and silver, and we are to be all different.”

“Pink—with red hair!” exclaimed her ladyship; “is not it astonishing that people can be so blind? But you ought to wear a diamond stomacher—don’t you think, my lord, Regina ought to wear the Beyminstre diamonds?”

“Not the least objection,” said Lord Oswestry, absorbed in his paper.

“I had rather not, Lady Oswestry,” answered Regina.

“But when you have them lying idle at the banker’s, why not use them?” pursued Lady Oswestry. “There’s not time perhaps to have them re-set, but we could manage to make them available; you could have a *rivière* to border your corsage, at any rate.”

“I had rather not!” persisted Regina; “I hate Beyminstre, and every thing connected with it!”

“You unaccountable girl!” cried Lady Oswestry.

Regina had finished breakfast, and was lingering over the flowers in the window. Lord Oswestry threw down his paper, and left the table.

“May I speak to you, if you please?” she asked, flushing with the effort, just as he was passing her.

“To be sure!” he replied; “now?”

“Yes—I had rather,” said Regina, who felt as if it would be; “now—or never.”

“I’m very jealous, but I’ll leave you together,” said Lady Oswestry, laughing, and glancing at her Honiton lace cap as she crossed the mirror.

“Will it do here?” he asked smiling, and pointing to the breakfast service.

“Oh, yes! I don’t want pen and ink,” she replied, breathing quick, while her cheeks rivalled the red camellia by her side.



He sat down near the sofa.

“I have seen nothing of you so long,” he said, “that I am quite a stranger to your proceedings; but this is the way we go on in London. You must excuse me, and tell me what you want.”

There was a frank kindness in his tone that always touched Regina.

“I am sure you have shewn me nothing but indulgence ever since I have been with you,” she said earnestly.

“Well, then, you have been a little extravagant, eh? all young ladies are so. We must pay your debts; it’s very natural—you are not exactly a beggar, with your fourteen thousand a year.”

“Oh! Lord Oswestry!” she exclaimed, quite horror-struck, “how can you think me so profligate? (coming out, in her dismay, with the most inappropriate term, which made Lord Oswestry smile;)—I don’t owe five pounds, I’m sure, in the world; no—it was something I wished to explain, and I’m afraid you will find me very tedious; I’ll try to make haste——”

“No, take your time; I have nothing to do;

don't hurry—you are quite out of breath," he said, with the same kindness.

"When Sir Herbert left me this estate," she began, "he left also a letter for my private reading, which explained his feelings with regard to the disposal of his property. He left it to me under the mistaken impression that I was likely to share it with a person to whom he had bound himself by an oath that he would not bequeath it directly. It is therefore my intention, as soon as I can do it legally, to transmit this bequest to the heir-at-law, Sir Alban Willingham, in accordance with the last wishes of his uncle."

"You astonish me!" said Lord Oswestry.

"Will you read the letter?" she asked, extending to him the dingy paper, while the colour mounted into her cheeks.

"But, my dear Miss Howard," he said, when he had glanced through it, folding it up and returning it as he spoke, "it is all very romantic, but there is not one sentence which need compel the most scrupulous conscience to give up this property. There is a contingency to which he refers,

and which, I confess, had suggested itself to my own mind, as a means of securing the interest and the happiness of two persons for whom I entertain a high regard ; but, failing that, Sir Herbert even takes pains to express that he desires you to remain in possession."

"That is a contingency quite out of the question," she said decidedly ; "Sir Herbert made a great mistake—owing, perhaps, to my long intimacy with Sir Alban's mother."

"Well, then, my dear Miss Howard, it is a flight even beyond the limits of romance to wish to throw away such a splendid position."

"It is not splendid to me ; I don't, indeed, like it—I have early acquired other tastes—but that is not the question. I think it is my duty to repair the mistake Sir Herbert made, and regretted—a very simple duty, and one that costs me nothing. I shall be richer then than most single women in my rank of life. I shall have twelve hundred a year, instead of fourteen thousand. Don't you pity me?"

"Indeed, Miss Howard, I must earnestly dissuade you——"

“I have resolved to do this ever since I first read that letter, nearly three years ago. It only remains to be decided whether, with your consent, I shall take the necessary steps now, or wait until the day after I come of age.”

“It would be my wish to facilitate your plans in every way,” remarked Lord Oswestry; “but, Sir Alban being my cousin, it would not look well that I should be concerned in this transfer.”

“I am so determined, and the time is so near, that your consent can make no difference, except in kindly enabling me to begin a few weeks earlier. I don’t want a public, grand consent, on your part; only tell me that you have no objection to my sending this letter to a Mr. Brand, a barrister, whom I am anxious to consult without delay.”

And Regina produced from her bag a letter, which she had received the day before, from Mr. Brand to his brother.

“A barrister! but do you know you will mortally offend your solicitor, Mr. Reynard, by addressing yourself to any other legal adviser?”

“But, Lord Oswestry, I should rather enjoy offending mortally Mr. Reynard—he is not a favourite of mine; I may send it to-day, may I not?”

“Why need you be in such a hurry?”

“I will give you one reason,” said Regina quickly, and colouring with anger; “Sir Alban has not disguised the feeling (as far as manner can express it) that I have used some underhand means to obtain this inheritance. I long for the day when I can fling him the titles of his beloved Beyminstre, and have done with the very name and thought of the Willinghams and their wealth. Then I shall be able to forgive the memory of Sir Herbert for all the miserable anxiety of the last three years—then I can look back to the happy days I spent with this man’s mother, and her last hours that I witnessed and consoled; and forget that she had a son who has dared to suspect my honour!”

“I don’t believe he has such a thought,” said Lord Oswestry; “if he could think so for a moment, he does not know you so well as I do.”

"Thank you!" she answered, with her ingenuous look.

"If there has been a—regard—between you," said Lord Oswestry, looking steadily among the camellias in the window, "and if any misunderstanding has arisen to check it—an alliance between you would be so very natural and suitable, that I should be truly glad to act as mediator."

"Lord Oswestry," said Regina, with the most energetic negative gesture, "I had rather ally myself with one of your grooms!"

"Well, then, it's hopeless," returned Lord Oswestry, smiling; "or else I think you should make allowance for a proud man. You don't know what it is to be suddenly deprived of an estate, to which you had always looked forward."

"I know what it is to be suddenly endowed with one, which I have fervently desired ever since to sink in the Red Sea," said Regina, as she rose from the table, and held out, in a half coaxing way, her letter to Lord Oswestry.

"Ay, ay! ladies are always in a hurry; you want this to go instantly, faster than the post



would take it. I will see to that," said his lordship; "why don't you add, 'With speed! ride, ride, for thy life! for thy life!' You, who are living in the days of starched ruffs, Pavins, and rapiers and daggers, can hardly hold any other language."

"Oh, I hope you will come and see our Pavin."

"If I can; there will be *one* graceful dancer, at any rate."

"We all look very grand, I can assure you."

"And who is this Mr. Brand, may I ask?"

"Brother to our Holmwood curate. You may look at me as much as you like. Our Holmwood curate—a very good man; I am very fond of him, and he is very partial to me, and he preaches very good sermons, and reads Shakspeare to perfection."

"Odd if he were *not* partial to you!" said Lord Oswestry to himself.

"Yes! and there it ends; and I expect to find his brother very intelligent. This dear little gardenia, I did not expect it would blow so soon."

"Remember, Miss Howard, that, till you marry,

my house will always be a home to you, as far as I can make it so—a happy home.”

“I marry! dear Lord Oswestry, who will have compassion on me after the first of June? But, with the sincerest thanks to you for your kindness, I shall beg to retire into private life as soon as possible. I am in a state of bewilderment here.”

“But you must not give us up altogether, if it were only out of consideration for Exmoor.”

“Dear little Exmoor! I must come and see you when you are very quiet down at Piermont, sometimes.”

“Well, then—is there any thing else I can do for you?”

“Nothing more; and a thousand thanks for staying to listen to my petty grievances, when you should be at your committee.”

“Plenty of time for that.”

“If my watch does not play me false, it is twelve o’clock; and, if your committee is not waiting for you, M. Bourrelêt is waiting for his pupils at Clairville House.”

A little flurried at finding herself late, and per-

haps rather excited by her conversation, Regina entered the gallery where they practised the Pavin, and found all the dancers assembled. Thé duchess was standing looking on, arm-in-arm with the duke, who was admitted for the first time to the rehearsal. Regina had never seen him before, and, as the duchess introduced her, she felt that his keen glance scanned her with more attention than he would be likely to bestow on any chance young lady. He looked at her as if he thought it possible she might be one day his daughter-in-law.

He had a forest of hair, in strong contrasts of black and grey, and keen irregular features. Regina could not help thinking of a Scotch terrier when she saw him.

Lord Ellesdon came directly to lead her to her place; as she was to be his partner, she thought nothing of that—he could not well have practised with any one else; but the scornful glances of the other young ladies, and their amiable asides, which they were very apt to make audible, made her fancy they were jealous of the notice she obtained. Miss St. Clair, as feeling herself the most at

home, was naturally most desirous to shew Regina these little attentions. She had long chosen Lord Ellesdon for herself, to the great alarm of the duchess, who knew that it is sometimes very intoxicating to a young man to find himself adored; but she was soon relieved by finding that her son disliked his cousin rather more actively than any of the garlanded young ladies he encountered in the ball-rooms. Perhaps he detested red hair—perhaps the “ignorance crasse,” of which his fair cousin rather boasted, annoyed a man who was extremely fond of scientific pursuits.

“Miss Howard,” cried Miss St. Clair, “are you aware that there are two Richards in the field? Another great heiress has appeared—the daughter of a man who sells gin!” ✕

“I did not know it,” said Regina.

“In what way can your information possibly interest Miss Howard?” asked Lord Ellesdon.

“I thought it only kind to warn her that she had a rival.”

“A rival!” retorted Lord Ellesdon. “It will interest a good many people to learn that any one

*not probable, that in 1807 society  
was like yours is far larger*

has appeared who can at all be put in competition with Miss Howard."

"Particularly when she blushes!" exclaimed Miss St. Clair, delighted to see that her impertinence had brought the colour into Regina's delicate cheek.

"Particularly! were it only for the rarity of the accomplishment."

"Besides, I had your interest in view, *mon beau cousin*; since you have appeared in your new character, you ought to be informed of the state of the market."

It was now Lord Ellesdon's turn to colour with anger, but he did not think it worth while to answer his cousin's wit. He contented himself with saying to Regina, in a low tone, "She is very ill-mannered, that young woman, but you must often have to put up with a good deal of ignorance from these girls; for they cannot easily forgive superiority."

The figures of the dance separated the young ladies for a few minutes, and then Miss St. Clair began again—

"I wonder you should wear blue, Miss Howard; I thought none but fair people could wear blue."

"I am not very learned in colours," remarked Lord Ellesdon; "but I think I know black when I see it, and I should say that Miss Howard was dressed in black silk."

"Of course, now!" cried Miss St. Clair; "I do all justice to the costliness of Miss Howard's *moire antique*; I am speaking of the costume for the ball."

"You have driven me to blue, Miss St. Clair," said Regina civilly; "for you had adopted rose colour before I joined the set."

This was so true, that Miss St. Clair fell back for a little while, and the dance went on.

"What is the harm of blue?" asked Lord Ellesdon of Regina.

"I am quite satisfied with it," she said; "but the milliners would say that blue *became* Miss St. Clair, and pink became me."

"I am heartily glad she has made the blunder," he replied, "for *she* depends upon the colour of her gown."



As he spoke, the duchess made him a sign, and he led Regina to the sofa where his mother was sitting.

“You are getting on very well,” said the duchess; “do you begin to like it?”

“Yes! I think it is so much prettier than a quadrille.”

“Do you think, my dear mother, you could stop that girl’s tongue?” asked Lord Ellesdon, pointing to his cousin.

“No!” said her grace; “not while she hath such sweet food to feed upon as Signor Benedick? It is you who put the little wasp into such a passion.”

“I like that!” he exclaimed; “I never speak to her from one week’s end to another.”

“Go, now, and ask her to waltz with you to-night at H—— House. That will soothe her.”

“Only it is too high a price to pay for her good-humour.”

“Well, then, go and say something civil to Lady Onora.”

“Oh! if you have secrets,” he returned, laugh-

ing; and he went off to follow his mother's directions.

"And whereabouts are you, in your romance of real life?" asked the duchess, turning with great sweetness to Regina.

"Oh! I am going on so well. I spoke to Lord Oswestry this morning, and he was very kind—as he always is—and I am to have an interview with Mr. Brand, the barrister, very soon."

"Do you know Sir Alban Willingham by reputation?"

"Oh, yes! Lord Oswestry esteems him very much."

"He had a very bad father."

"But a very, very good mother—and such a beautiful woman!"

"You were acquainted with her?"

"Yes—very intimately!"

"Then Sir Alban is not quite a stranger to you?"

"Not entirely—but we are not friends."

And Regina felt the blush deepening all over her face; and, to explain it, she went on hastily

telling the duchess that Sir Alban was very angry at not having Beyminstre, and she was sure he thought she had obtained it in some underhand manner; and she described to the duchess the two only interviews she had ever had with Sir Herbert, she described her grandmother, and her early life at Holmwood, and told of all the annoyances that had followed her attempts to get rid of the bequest.

“I don’t know why I inflict this long history upon your grace,” she said.

“Because you feel that it interests me,” replied the duchess; “a little nature, a little truth, are so refreshing. But I am sorry you do not resign in favour of a more amiable hero.”

“I resign to Sir Herbert’s heir,” said Regina; “and therefore it is a matter of indifference to me what sort of man he is. I dare say he will be a very good landlord; and he has shewn the worst side of his character to me. Beyminstre is his idol, and he could not forgive the person who took it from him.”

“I should like nothing better than to be present when you restore it.”

“ And, if it is to be a public restitution, permit me to invite your grace in advance.”

“ I think Ellesdon met him at Piermont.”

“ Yes, he did.”

“ You will not like the affair talked about?”

“ I had rather not. I should be sorry Sir Alban heard it from any one but myself. Besides, I am not yet quite sure it can be done.”

“ I think I know enough of law to prophesy that it can.”

“ I have reason to believe it.”

“ Ellesdon, what did you think of Sir Alban Willingham when you met him at Piermont?”

“ Oh, a very gentlemanly man—don’t you think so?” addressing Regina.

She only bowed.

“ Is that all?” asked the duchess.

“ Very intelligent, too—quite a reading man, is he not?”

“ He may be,” said Regina; “ you did not remark that we were not on speaking terms.”

“ Is he handsome?” inquired the duchess.

“ Ask Lord Ellesdon!”

“ Ask Miss Howard !”

“ Well, between you both, I am to die in ignorance.”

“ It was my sense of justice,” said Regina; “ I felt that I was too partial to be a judge.”

“ I think him as fine-looking a man as ever I saw,” said Lord Ellesdon; “ he looks like one of Vandyke’s portraits.”

“ It was singular your being together in the house for so long,” said the duchess.

“ Very unpleasant for both parties; but Lord Oswestry is very fond of his cousin, and he could not shut his doors on him because I was his ward. He made me a very civil speech on Sir Alban’s first appearance.”

“ What a beautiful Arab mare that was he had brought with him !” remarked Lord Ellesdon.

“ Mootee ! yes, for a little thing !”

“ They are never large, you know, the Arab horses.”

“ Does he come to town, do you know, Miss Howard ? I have rather a curiosity to see him,” said the duchess.

“His next movements have not been proclaimed in my hearing. Happily he won’t live with the Oswestrys here, as he did in the country.”

A servant in black now threaded his way up to Regina, and informed her that Lady Oswestry was waiting in the carriage to take Miss Howard home.

“Till Thursday!” said the duchess, as she shook hands with Regina and gave her to Lord Ellesdon, who led her to the carriage.

“Bless me—what a tender parting look!” said Lady Oswestry, laughing; “it’s all right! I give you joy! I always wished myself to be a duchess.”

“My dear Ellesdon,” said the duchess, when her son returned to her, “don’t suffer yourself to think seriously of that charming creature. You deserve her a thousand-fold—but, you may trust my experience, you will lose your time. Her heart is already occupied!”



## CHAPTER IV.

“WILLINGHAM is come to town,” said Lord Oswestry, the next morning at breakfast.

“If you had told me so yesterday, I should have been deeply interested,” returned his lady; “but to-day, when I am thinking so much of the ball at Clareville House, I care for nothing else. I *hope*, my dear Regina, that your skirt will be well hung.”

“Very likely, Lady Oswestry,” said Regina, who was certainly not thinking of her skirt.

“She is dreaming about her bouquet,” cried her ladyship; “this morning early (the Clareville set are very early people), a superb bouquet of Neapolitan violets was left here for Miss Howard, from the *Duchess* of Clareville. Well! I thank my stars I am not a hypocrite!”

“Is that to my address, Lady Oswestry?” asked Regina, laughing.

“No, my dear, you certainly are transparent enough: I was alluding to Lord Ellesdon, who seems to use his mother’s name without much ceremony. He came to our box last night, my lord, and asked us if we had read Crichton, and called Regina *Esclairmonde*.”

“Upon my word,” said Lord Oswestry, “I suppose he will soon be waiting upon *me*.”

“It *was* the duchess who sent me the violets!” cried Regina; “she promised them to me the last time I went to Clareville House to practise. Some of the ladies were abusing Neapolitan violets, and the duchess agreed with me in liking their bitter smell, and she promised me some. And *she* called me *Esclairmonde*—Lord Ellesdon was only quoting his mother.”

“He seemed to agree with her, at any rate,” observed Lady Oswestry.

“I suppose I may bring Alban home to dinner?” said Lord Oswestry.

“Bring him by all means; but don’t invite a

herd of men to meet him—because we mean to be very quiet, and make no toilet, and then burst out in all our splendour about eleven.”

“He is the last man, I should think, to notice your dress,” said Lord Oswestry laughing.

“Oh! by the way, have you got his appointment?”

“I have got the promise of it; and he has come up to town to be introduced to the governor—but I hope it may end in his not going out, after all!”

He looked at Regina as if to catch her eye, but she was leaving the room.

“Why should he not go out?” asked Lady Oswestry; “has he captivated an heiress down at Cheltenham?”

“Not that I know of; but such strange things do turn up—property changes hands in so unexpected a manner.”

“I daresay he is going to marry a tawny princess!” said Lady Oswestry. “He is just the man to make a crazy match.”

“I don’t think so, at all! I should say he was

just the man, if he ever did marry, to choose some one who would be the envy of the world."

Regina had paused when he spoke of property changing hands, and addressed to him an appealing look, as if to entreat him not to betray her secret.

They were all leaving the room together, and Lord Oswestry, finding himself next her, said in a low tone, "Your looks do not often require to be put into words, Miss Howard, but I don't quite know what you meant just now—something I was to do, or was not to do."

"I meant only that I wished you not to tell my lady about the estate, because—you know—she would laugh at me."

"True!" he said; "there are more ways than one of viewing the interests and the duties of life. Well—I will keep your secret."

They met again just before dinner. Regina had had a most satisfactory interview with Mr. J. Brand, and she was in brilliant looks and spirits.

"What a slavery this life is!" remarked Lady Oswestry; "I have been half over the town this

morning about my pearl net; but it is right, at last—the tassels are flat and wide, like those to a cardinal's hat."

"I give you joy!" said Regina; "I know those tassels have been on your mind ever since the invitations came out."

"And you have been working with a vengeance!" said her ladyship. "What could you have so particular to say to that very worthy and stout individual, who spent an hour with you in the back drawing-room?"

"Oh! some business matters—but it was the pleasantest interview! Lord Oswestry, I am longing to tell you all about it."

"No! you must not tell me—I am not to hear a word; don't you remember?"

"You must just hear this little bit——"

"No, no! keep it to yourself."

"I am determined——"

Regina followed him from one window to another, trying to make him listen.

"I will have nothing to do with the matter," he said, taking refuge in the last window; "here

is Alban Willingham—talk to him about it—it concerns him the most.”

Sir Alban was just entering. Regina turned and bowed to him as he passed her to pay his respects to Lady Oswestry. He returned her greeting; but, somewhat to her astonishment, just as she had recommenced her attack upon Lord Oswestry, he came back and shook hands with her cordially, and hoped she had quite recovered her health.

“I think you have only to look at Miss Howard to answer that question,” said Lord Oswestry.

“She ought to be very thankful that she is in such good looks to-night, above all times,” said Lady Oswestry from her sofa.

“Why, to night?” asked Sir Alban, taking a chair by Regina, and fixing on her such a searching look that he could not fail to see that she was indeed more beautiful than ever.

“Because I am going to a fancy ball,” she said, in a constrained tone; and she felt suddenly shy and uneasy at the thought of her splendid costume,



and the dance she was to assist in, which was quite the feature of the evening—she felt how he would dislike such publicity, if he cared for a woman—she felt that, if their engagement had subsisted, he would not be going that night to Clareville House in such a character; at that moment, she would have given the world not to be obliged to dance even the stately and formal Pavin.

“May I ask whose ball it is?” asked Sir Alban.

“The Duchess of Clareville gives it,” said Regina.

Sir Alban looked pleased.

“And I hope you mean to be very grateful to me for securing you a ticket,” remarked Lady Oswestry; “there’s your card on the chimney-piece.”

Sir Alban could do no less than go up to Lady Oswestry’s sofa to overwhelm her with thanks, and take his card.

“I know you have a beautiful Egyptian costume,” said her ladyship.

“Oh! yes—a Nizam dress. Will that do?”

“I did not think you would go, Willingham,” remarked Lord Oswestry.

“Why, it is rather out of my way; but I cannot do less than go, as Lady Oswestry has been so kind as to exert herself in my behalf.”

But his eye returned to Regina with that distinct regard which she often remarked in Lord Oswestry—a look which is peculiarly a sign of race—where the glance falls palpably, like a touch, on the object looked at, instead of the unmeaning, powerless gaze of uneducated and ill-born persons.

“You shall not escape me now,” whispered Regina, as dinner was announced, and Lord Oswestry led her down-stairs.

“I am quite sorry you are to wear a head-dress to-night,” he said; “it is a positive injury to hide your hair, and the outline of your head.”

“Yes—it is all right! We have settled every thing—Mr. Brand is such a clear-headed man—nothing is easier!”

“And Lord Ellesdon is to be Crichton, I hear—that gives particular meaning to *Esclairmonde*.”

“Will you listen? That worthy Jew has been cheating us all these years—five minutes’ conversation with Mr. Brand would have set all right from the first. He said he never heard of a more impudent mystification; but the method—that I will not tell you yet.”

“I am really glad to find there’s something you will not tell me,” interposed Lord Oswestry.

“I shall soon be free as air! I feel as if I could fly—like Ariel! Oh! how foolish it is for people to wish for money!”

“I suppose that was never your weakness.”

“Yes—once. Oh! I could preach such a sermon—but I don’t wish to be serious just now.”

“I hope you won’t marry a curate, after all!” said Lord Oswestry, as they entered the dining-room.

“I might do worse!” laughed Regina, “but

‘Sta mejor sta mejor ser soltera!’”

quoting a line from one of her little Spanish songs, which Lord Oswestry was never tired of hearing her sing.

“You don’t mean to go on singing that all your

life, I trust," cried Lady Oswestry; "but I rely a good deal on this evening. A certain gentleman will sing a second to that ballad, if I'm not much mistaken, in a very different key."

Regina blushed. Sir Alban was looking at her with an expression of deep interest.

"And were you pleased with Cheltenham?" asked her ladyship.

"Not at all! a glaring overgrown watering-place!"

"They are very gay there, I suppose?"

"Yes, in their way."

"I began to think you meant to come back with a Lady Willingham," said Lady Oswestry, archly.

"Did you? She would have been a choice production."

"You don't seem to have been much charmed by the Cheltenham belles," said Lord Oswestry.

"And I am not at present called upon to resign Mootee," laughed her ladyship.

"Not just yet, Lady Oswestry."

"What has become of Henry Montresor?" asked Lord Oswestry.

“I have not seen him this age,” said her ladyship; “he has not been here, I believe, since Regina refused him.”

They were now at dessert, and the servants had retired.

“I?—Oh, Lady Oswestry! how can you say such a thing?” exclaimed poor Regina, her face crimson.

“You *didn't* refuse him? I'm glad of it for his sake; but I thought you did, you looked so very odd when you joined me after that interview. Perhaps you will say he did not ask you. Young ladies tell such——”

Regina looked so distressed that Lord Oswestry came to her aid.

“Nobody has any business to ask Miss Howard any such questions; let them ask *me*, at least till June: and, if Henry Montresor has any inquiries to address to me, I think I know what answer I had better give him.”

And he turned with a smile to Regina. She tried to laugh, but she was much more near crying.

“Now, you must try and exist without us,” said

Lady Oswestry, rising in her slow, indolent way ;  
“ we are going to look after our dresses—this is not an ordinary occasion.”

“ What can have changed him so much ? ” thought Regina, as her maid dressed her ; “ how altered he seems ! I could almost have fancied we were at Holmwood—not quite, however, for I am not to be flung to and fro, like an old glove. He looked at me as if he wished to speak, so often. Perhaps it is I who am proud ; but I cannot, and will not, bend to his pleasure ! And I have an old debt to pay—three weeks more, and what happiness ! ”

“ No ! I don’t like it at all, Flimsey, (to her maid who stood with eyes uplifted.) It is stiff and angular, and far too rich—the only thing that pleases me is this *coiffe* of silver gauze, which certainly softens the features.”

It did soften the face, and surrounded it with that “ dim radiance ” which is the crowning charm of beauty. Her features looked transparent as porcelain, while her slender dark brows and thoughtful eyes were thrown into strong relief.



And her hair (which never softens a face), being combed quite back, her countenance was illumined by an expression at once brilliant and tender, that struck even herself with something of pleasure and surprise.

It was, however, a beautiful dress—of that decided blue that particularly suits dark-haired people with fair skins, brocaded with silver flowers, and trimmed down all the seams with narrow silver lace. The jacket, with quaint tight sleeves fitting close to her slender figure, and a long veil of silver gauze hanging like a cloud behind. She went into the drawing-room at eleven, to wait for Lady Oswestry, who was never in time; and there she found Sir Alban, in his splendid Egyptian costume of black and gold, standing by the fire—for it was a bleak rainy May evening.

“It’s cold!” she said, drawing near the mantelpiece. He looked at her earnestly for a few moments, as one might at a picture that startles you by its perfection, and then replied, “Very! true May weather—much less bearable than January.”

“Eleven o’clock!” said Regina, looking at the timepiece.

“I suppose you thought as I did,” he replied, “that eleven meant eleven—whereas it seems very doubtful when we go, and I suppose that even you have no idea when we come away.”

“When we like,” said Regina; “but I am rather anxious to be punctual to-night.”

He looked at her as if he attached a particular meaning to what she said; he was thinking of Lord Ellesdon.

“Do you find all this going out too much for you?” he asked in a minute.

“No! because I go out but seldom; and chiefly in a morning, to concerts and exhibitions. This is my first ball.”

“Young ladies are not generally so moderate,” said Sir Alban.

“No! and if I had come to town three years ago, I should have been wild to go every where; but three years make a little difference—I have had some things to sober me——”

Sir Alban made a step towards her with some

agitation of manner—then stopped short, and said, looking round, “Have not you a cloak?”

“No!” she said, laughing away the emotion with which she had spoken, “I am forced to go without because of my ruff.”

“But you do not mean to catch cold for the sake of your ruff—Oswestry, Miss Howard has no cloak.”

Lord Oswestry, who was just entering in a Vandyke dress of murrey-coloured velvet, with Venice point, came up to Regina, and looked critically at her dress. He gave her a smile of approbation; and then said, “Don’t trouble yourself about the ladies’ cloaks—if Miss Howard should feel cold she will be very welcome to mine. But the ruff is the first thing to be considered—is it not? Will you waltz with me?”

“With great pleasure,” said Regina, not daring to look at Sir Alban.

“After the Pavin, the Lavolta,” said Lord Oswestry; “there will be nothing out of character in that.”

“The light Lavolt—I suppose it was a Sauteuse,” said Regina.

“What are you laughing at?” asked Lady Oswestry, sweeping into the room in her gorgeous Florentine costume—her heavy pearl net, through which her rich hair shone like dark satin—her white and gold train, and rose-coloured brocade petticoat and sleeves. “Come Regina! the carriages are waiting, and so is somebody at Clareville House.”

“You are very wicked to-night, Lady Oswestry,” said Regina, when they were alone in the carriage.

“No, my dear! I only wish to tease Sir Alban a little—for I think he is beginning to be in love with you.”

“Oh, Lady Oswestry! what an impossible idea!”

“Watch him!—by the way, how superb he looks in that dress! Poor Lord Ellesdon—I am afraid, if he were really to take the field——”

“Don’t, Lady Oswestry—they neither of them think a bit about me!”

“Then, my dear, they are fools!—that’s all! It is very odd I am not jealous of you—why is it? for you are very beautiful, and very much admired.”

“Because you are more beautiful, and more admired,” said Regina, laughing. “There! if you will be so civil, there is no reason why I should not speak my mind.”

And these two beautiful women entered the corridor at Clareville House, more gay and good-humoured, and more pleased with each other, than any two beauties who alighted at those doors during that night.

It was evident that Lord Ellesdon had been on the watch for Regina—he was at her side directly, and led her to the end of the ball-room where the Pavin was to be danced. He told her frankly that she looked very beautiful, and that his cousin had disfigured herself finely, and he hoped she would get out of sight as much as she could.

He did not look so well in Crichton’s dress as he did in his ordinary costume. The low-crowned hat of Henry the Eighth’s time, would have suited his countenance better than the velvet toque and white feathers of the French court of Henry the Third.

And now the abrupt marked strains of the Pavin,

composed expressly for the ball at Clareville House, rang through the room, and the dancers were led to their places. Regina looked round for some safe place to lay her bouquet, when Sir Alban, who was close behind, held out his hand for it.

“You may trust it to me,” he said; “for I don’t dance—and in such a crowd it would be a chance if you ever saw it again.”

It was a crowd, such as she had never seen before—the space for the dancers was protected by red silk ropes, or they would not have been able to stem the throng. Great people seemed to her to be quite as curious as little people. The dance was one great attraction; and Regina, though she did not think so, was another. The men were anxious to see the beautiful young heiress, who went out so very little; and all the young ladies were wild to examine the dresses of the dancers, and the figures of the dance.

They had all been trained, and all acquitted themselves well; it was a very graceful dance, and admired as much as the performers could wish. Of course, there were some amiable people who



ridiculed the whole concern from beginning to end, but their opinions did not reach those most concerned.

Regina caught the sweet glance of the duchess from time to time—and she never lost sight of Sir Alban, standing near and watching her, with her bouquet in his hand. She saw the rugged head of the Duke of Clareville bent respectfully in conversation with an old whitehaired man, the first glance of whom sent all the blood with a shock to her heart, for she recognised in an instant the noble features of the great Hero of England!

And through all the stately postures and pauses of the figure, her eyes were dazzled with a shifting crowd of gorgeous colours, glittering jewels, plumed hats, and strange faces, all turned towards her part of the room.

The duchess was close to her as the Pavin concluded.

“A great success, my dear Miss Howard!” she whispered; “and now shew me which is Sir Alban.”

Regina blushing, pointed him out.

“A very noble-looking person,” she said; “you resign in favour of a *gentleman*. Is that your bouquet he holds?”

“For which I have very much to thank your grace,” said Regina.

“Ellesdon, present him to me,” said the duchess; and her son hastened to comply with her wish, while Regina tried to retire into the background, behind the ample velvet folds of her grace’s Elizabethan dress. She thought then, as she had often done before, how superior he was in calm dignity of bearing to every one around him—with what perfect unconsciousness he wore his brilliant dress, peculiarly effective to a fair complexion; she wondered whether the duchess observed, as she did, that Lord Ellesdon could not in the slightest degree sustain a comparison with him—which was not very likely.

“You have been a great traveller, Sir Alban,” said the duchess.

“Yes!” he replied, “but always on compulsion; he believed he should hardly leave England again, if he followed his own choice.”

Regina felt her arm slightly compressed by the duchess.

“You leave England soon, do you not?”

“In a few months,” he said; “I return to India, by way of Egypt, where, I understand, Lord Ellesdon has some thoughts of travelling.”

“Do you recommend it?”

“Very much—a traveller can see nothing more strange within the same distance.”

“And the heat?”

“Almost intolerable in the hot season.”

“Ellesdon!”

“My dear mother, you know I like heat.”

“We will not go to Egypt!” said the duchess, caressingly to Regina.

“It is the very spot Miss Howard most desires to visit,” cried Lord Ellesdon.

“I’ve changed my mind,” said Regina.

“Since when?” asked Lord Ellesdon.

“Since this morning.”

The duchess looked at her, so did Sir Alban; but they were not the wiser for their looks.

“Why?” asked her grace boldly.

“Because I am sure, now, I can be happy any where; and England is good enough in all conscience for people who are easy in their minds.”

“Now, I would give a thousand pounds,” said Lord Ellesdon bluntly, “to know what has happened—this morning, too!”

Sir Alban looked as if he was quite willing to outbid the last speaker.

Her only reply was a laugh—a charming, coquettish little laugh.

“So that,” said the duchess, “the plagues of Egypt are no fiction?”

“No! but they need not deter your grace. I spent some weeks at Cairo with the Oswestrys; and Lady Oswestry seemed to enjoy herself extremely.”

“I think I may relieve you of my bouquet,” said Regina, holding out her hand shyly.

“You are going to waltz,” he said; “you had better leave it with me.”

Lord Oswestry was approaching to claim her.

“Will you save one waltz for me?” asked

Lord Ellesdon; "I know you are beset—but you must give me one waltz."

"I'm so sorry—but this is my last dance," said Regina.

"Break through your rule for once. Duchess, can't you persuade Miss Howard for me?"

"Won't you?" urged the duchess.

"I'm not strong enough, really," she replied, as she went off with Lord Oswestry; and she was presently seen whirling round in the circle, the very picture of enjoyment.

But when this waltz was finished, she refused all introductions, all entreaties, to dance again. She begged Lord Oswestry to lead her to some retired corner, where she might rest in peace until Lady Oswestry should be inclined to go home. And there she sat quietly until Lord Ellesdon found her out, and insisted on walking with her through the suite of rooms, and shewing her some celebrated pictures; and every one she met looked at her and her companion, and whispered that the match was arranged between Lord Ellesdon and the great heiress. And he

took her down to supper—having been his partner in the Pavin—and people smiled and whispered still more—and the duke looked intelligent, and the duchess delighted; and when Sir Alban restored her bouquet, and followed her to the carriage, he was more silent and more melancholy than ever, hardly laughed at Lady Oswestry's jokes, and answered my lord at cross purposes. But when Regina put her violets into water that night, she could not help thinking that they had somewhat diminished in quantity.



## CHAPTER V.

“ENTER the Countess of Ellesdon!” cried Lady Oswestry the next morning, when Regina made her appearance rather late at the breakfast-table.

Sir Alban was breakfasting with them, and Regina did not much like the salutation.

“I wish you would not call names, Lady Oswestry,” she said, as she glided into her chair.

“You were called so many last night,” remarked Lord Oswestry, “that you are weary of them.”

“Don’t be bashful, my dear!” laughed Lady Oswestry; “*that’s* the cream, if you have no objection; don’t startle your tea with an oblation of honey; the duke is so pleased, he can hardly keep in his satisfaction—for all the world knows

how fond he is of money, and he need not increase his son's allowance if he marries an heiress."

"It would serve him right if——" Regina began eagerly, and checked herself. Lord Oswestry laughed behind his newspaper.

"That's right, my dear!" said Lady Oswestry; "marry from pique—I give you my word it will do as well as any other feeling! And you will be very happy—good husbands run in the family—the duke is a model husband, and the sky-blue duchess is a pattern wife!"

Regina, with a discontented gesture, applied herself to her breakfast.

"Here you are at full length, Miss Howard," said Lord Oswestry, handing her the *Morning Post*. "The grand ball at Clareville House, and the whole history of the Pavin, dresses and partners—a flowery panegyric, and a delicate allusion."

"They could hardly say too much in praise of your Pavin," said Sir Alban. "There cannot be a more graceful dance."

Regina looked up quickly, and coloured. Lady Oswestry held out her hand for the paper.

“ Oh, yes !—here it is ! I thought so from your blushing,” she said, glancing down the columns.

“ ‘It is rumoured that a marriage is shortly to take place between the lovely and accomplished heiress of ——.’ ”

“ Will you stop, Lady Oswestry ? ” exclaimed Regina ; “ I do think it is very insolent of the papers——”

“ Very insolent of Lord Ellesdon’s valet ! ” said her ladyship, mockingly. “ My dear, that race of people are insolent. They pry and spy about, and communicate their impressions to the editors ; and, really, the way you went on last night must have given that intelligent gentleman’s gentleman a very reasonable idea that you were *miching mallecho*—I don’t know how Lady Onora will get over it.”

“ Lady Onora ? ”

“ Didn’t you know she was dying for Lord Ellesdon ? Poor girl—how she has been wasting her time ! ”

“ That beautiful creature ! I cannot believe it.”

“ I don’t see why you should be incredulous.

A good many beautiful creatures have been at his feet for the last two or three years."

"Oh, Lady Oswestry, it is shocking to hear you talk so! The idea of any woman stooping to give a thought to a man who does not care for her——"

"The very thing to make a woman give a thought to a man," said her ladyship, laughing. "I do like to see you look so indignant; but I thought you, as a well-educated young lady, were aware that people always desire that which is out of their reach."

"I am sure that is not my case," said Regina.

"No! Lord Ellesdon is any thing but out of your reach," retorted her ladyship, laughing.

"What are you going to do this morning, Miss Howard?" asked Lord Oswestry, good-naturedly, wishing to change the conversation.

"The duchess is to call for me after luncheon, to take me a drive," she replied, looking away from Lady Oswestry, who burst into another peal of laughter.

"I would have nothing to say to a man who

was too lazy to come courting himself," cried her ladyship; "don't let the excellent mama talk you over!"

"She does not wish to talk me over—nor does Lord Ellesdon!" exclaimed Regina. "It is hard if I cannot dance once with a man without all this gossip."

"And his lecture on painting last night—I hope, at least, he improved the occasion," said Lady Oswestry. Regina could not help laughing as she left the room.

"Is there any thing in it?" asked Sir Alban in an indifferent tone. "Is Miss Howard engaged to Lord Ellesdon?"

"You saw what I saw last night," replied Lady Oswestry; "she was the only woman he took any pains to be civil to. Stupid, stiff man! I hope with all my heart she is only laughing at him."

"I saw that Lord Ellesdon was devoted to her, but that tells me nothing; it was nothing wonderful that he should seek to please the most beautiful woman in the room—except the present company."

“ You are always so polite, Sir Alban ; as for Regina, of course she will be only too happy.”

“ I beg to differ from you,” said Lord Oswestry. “ I am sure Miss Howard will never accept Lord Ellesdon.”

“ I wish I had a heavy bet upon it !” exclaimed her ladyship.

“ It is no concern of mine,” remarked Sir Alban ; “ but I may be pardoned some little curiosity to know who will be one day master of Beyminstre.”

“ I have my own ideas on the subject,” said Lord Oswestry ; “ but if you will go down with us to Piermont for the first of June, when Miss Howard takes possession, I imagine that your curiosity will be gratified.”

“ I accept with much pleasure,” said Sir Alban ; “ I cannot altogether shake off my interest in Beyminstre—and Miss Howard is so very worthy of her good fortune, that I should be glad to learn where her choice has fallen.”

“ Such a woman could not choose ill,” said Lord Oswestry.



“ If I were in your place, I should wish to poison her !” cried Lady Oswestry.

Sir Alban, laughing, disclaimed any such extreme measures—“ Beautiful women were still too rare to be disposed of in that summary manner.”

“ And when I think how the case might have been simplified, if you had chosen to behave like a rational being,” said Lord Oswestry.

“ Miss Howard is not to be had for the asking, and I am the last person to make the experiment,” replied Sir Alban, turning away.

The duchess had received an invitation to Piermont for three days, to witness Miss Howard’s coming of age, and, when she called to drive out with Regina, she brought her acceptance.

They had grown very intimate. Except the Oswestrys, the duchess was the only person whom she had any idea of retaining as an acquaintance, as soon as she returned to her old habits of existence.

“ And whenever your grace has a little leisure, and a little curiosity to witness the genuine ‘middle life’ of this country,” said Regina, “ I expect that

you will send me a line, and come to pass a few days with me in my cottage at Holmwood."

"That I will do, with great pleasure," replied the duchess, "though I suspect there is very little middle life to be found, similar to that depicted in your Holmwood retirement; but this must not interfere with your arrangements. You mean to pass the autumn at the lakes—do you not? You will then be near Ellesdon Castle, and you must come to see me."

"But, you know, I shall not be alone at the lakes," said Regina.

"And your young invalid friend will not be your only companion, I suppose?" said the duchess. "Some elderly lady will reside with you."

"Do you think that quite necessary?" asked Regina; "for I confess that such a person would very much interfere with my comfort."

"Indeed, if you were a relation of mine, I should very strongly urge it," replied the duchess. "You would be too young, even if you were plain, to live without some kind of *chaperon*; and, though

people almost always think foolishly, yet we must pay some attention to what they think, if we would go through the world with any degree of comfort."

"Can you help me to such a person?" asked Regina.

"I was just thinking of a lady who might suit you, the widow of a clergyman—that sounds well, you know—a mild, elderly person; not clever, but very good."

"If she is too good, she will not do," said Regina. "I mean, if she objects to my having Miss Carleton to live with me, when she knows about her having run away; because Lady Oswestry says that her character is lost."

"I will not conceal from you, my dear, that she has done herself very serious harm by that unfortunate step; but we must try to get her through it as well as we can. I am sure Mrs. Shirley will make no objection on that ground; she would only pity the poor child—she is very much disposed to pity."

"Then I am sure she will suit me. Will you kindly write to her?"

“I will see her, for she is in town, and you shall meet her at my house; there is nothing like having an interview.”

“She shall go to Keswick a week before us, and get every thing ready for our arrival.”

“How provident you are! Is your young *protégée* clever?”

“No, except in music; but she writes me that she has lost her voice.”

“Is she beautiful? But I may take that for granted, as she was honoured by the notice of Lord Henry Montresor.”

“I cannot tell you how lovely she was before her illness; but I am sadly afraid that, for the present, her beauty has gone with her voice.”

“And you think Lord Henry has given her up?”

“He would, if he saw her, in a moment—but I know he has followed her to Holmwood, and has been refused admittance; though I believe he is still hanging about in her neighbourhood, for we don’t see him in town.”

“Well, you can spare him.”

“I can, indeed! I had forgotten his existence till you began to speak about Edith. I don’t think there is a meaner wretch in the world than he is; and I hope your grace does not think I am sighing for him because I express my disgust—Lady Oswestry says it is a sign of regard.”

“Oh, no!” said the duchess, laughing; “I think your dispraise is perfectly candid. What you said of Sir Alban, for instance——”

“Did I speak ill of Sir Alban?” asked Regina, starting and colouring; “I know nothing against him, except that I think he is unjust to me—and that makes me angry, and perhaps, unreasonable, because his mother thought well of me, and I fancy that esteem should be hereditary.”

“I am angry with him, too,” said the duchess kindly; “I do not like any one to think less of you than I do myself.”

At last the day arrived on which they were all to go down to Piermont. Regina had often felt as if it never would come. She felt that her business was over with the London world. She had seen but little of it; though quite enough for

one whose future life was to be passed in retirement. She had been presented a few days previously, and very much admired.

She had seen some splendid entertainments, some of the best company, some works of art that she would not have missed; but, with the exception of the Duchess of Clareville, she had not met with one person, out of the Oswestry family, whom she desired to see again.

They had been at the opera the night before, and Regina came down to their late breakfast with a vague pageant in her head of the imposing groups in the Huguenots, mixed with the graceful spirit dances of the ballet.

Lady Oswestry, at the head of the breakfast table, was in brilliant looks—used to hot crowds and late hours, she paid no penalty for her amusement the next morning. Sir Alban was talking and laughing with her—Lord Oswestry, a little apart, was breaking open his letters. The post is coming in all day in London, and he used to congratulate himself sometimes, on being able at least to breakfast in peace, instead of having to



wade through a packet every morning, as he did in the country.

He turned to Regina with a smile, as she came in.

"You have been spreading a panic, Miss Howard," he said; "it is evidently known that you are going out of town. These are your concerns."

He selected three letters from the heap he had opened, and laid them down beside her plate.

"Good gracious!—*three?*" she exclaimed, casting her eyes down upon them over the rim of her coffee cup.

"Three! yes!—but I don't see how it matters to you if there were three dozen. It is I who have to write the answers, not you."

"I am very grateful," she replied; "but these are the last you will be troubled with."

"Well, your answers?"

"No, no, no!"

"One a piece—any reasons?"

"Any thing that occurs to you, if you think proper. I do not see they have a right to reasons.

Stay ! have I ever seen this person ? (pointing to the signature of one of the letters ;) because, if I chance to meet him in society, I ought to be aware of the fact."

"Why, I introduced him to you myself at the British gallery, not a fortnight ago."

"I remember ! a very pleasant person, a French count, who had known some of my family in Anjou."

"It was not the Frenchman. Don't you remember, when you were looking at Landseer's picture, a man with a glass, whom I named to you ?"

"I remember the picture, but not the man."

"You see, Alban," said Lord Oswestry laughing, "the work that is likely to be cut out for you when you become guardian to a young lady."

"Not a very probable case," returned Sir Alban.

"Your turn will come," cried Lady Oswestry, "and I foresee it will be quite a novel. On your return to India, one of your brave companions in arms, dying on the field, in company with a smoky

cannon, a moon, and three helmets, bequeaths to you—his only daughter——”

Here Lady Oswestry made her voice falter, and none of her audience could help laughing.

“You are incommoded, certainly,” her ladyship continued; “but you cannot refuse—you accept the charge—you educate her——”

“My dear Lady Oswestry, have a little mercy.”

“Be silent! I don’t mean the slate and pencil part of the teaching; but you form her mind, you gain her heart, and at length you obtain her hand. A large fortune drops from the clouds upon the happy couple, and the scene closes. There! If I were not too lazy to write that out fair for the annuals, it would be worth a hundred pounds to me. Regina shall do it instead.”

Regina laughed, with a little twinge of jealousy towards the imaginary young lady. Sir Alban laughed too, not quite naturally, and glanced at Regina. Lord Oswestry, still busied with his letters, now looked up and said, “Why, he has something of that sort on his hands as it is.”

“And that took him down to Cheltenham! Didn't I say so? Regina, didn't I say he was gone there to marry a blackamoor?”

Regina tried to laugh, and said, “Certainly!”

“But why a blackamoor?” asked Sir Alban.

“Oh! we won't be particular as to a shade of colour, but I shall think you very ill-natured if you don't tell me the whole history: my story will grow into a volume. I'll now write a Christmas book—sit down again, I am sure you can spare the time.”

“I shall spoil your Christmas book, Lady Oswestry.”

“How so?”

“By turning your poetry into prose.”

“But I mean it to be prose, so begin.”

“You have described the scene with great accuracy, even to the accessories. A friend of mine did die on the field after the battle of Aliwal; there was even a moon, I recollect, by the light of which he wrote in pencil a few lines of farewell to his wife, which he intrusted to me almost with his last breath; he also begged me, if she was ever in

want of a friend, to give her all the assistance in my power. I promised of course, and told her so when I forwarded to her the scrap of paper containing her husband's adieu."

"Was she pretty?" asked Lady Oswestry.

"I had not then seen her, but I am happy now to inform your ladyship, that she is a fine, showy young woman, with manners to correspond."

"Well! and she appealed to your protection? How interesting!"

"Yes! I had heard nothing of her till she wrote lately to beg me to come down to Cheltenham to give her my advice. She had got into some difficulty with a lawyer, who strikes me as being not good for much—a Mr. Reynard; and, as she backed up her request by a touching allusion to the promise I had made her dear husband, I lost no time in obeying her commands."

"Well! now for the interview—though there is a little tone of satire, Sir Alban, in your narrative, that I don't quite like."

"Well, Lady Oswestry, I confess that the scene you so eloquently depicted was as present

to me when I reached her door, as at the moment when I was supporting poor Ruthven while he wrote, each word slower and slower, till the pencil fell from his hand. It was evening, too, and the moon was up. There is something in moonlight to me,—I mean I have always a very vivid recollection of any scene I have witnessed by moonlight, it makes a stronger impression on my senses than any other. The outlines are sharper I believe.”

Regina thought of their moonlight walk across the common.

“It is singular! that is *my* case,” remarked Lord Oswestry. “I could recall half a dozen scenes by moonlight with that sort of intense distinctness you mention.”

“Well! I asked for Mrs. Ruthven, and I was shewn up-stairs. I noticed at the time two or three ladies, in fluttering dresses, were going up just before me, and there was a sound of music overhead. My name was announced, and I found myself in a ball-room, and a shewy woman in pink and silver, who was waltzing past, whirled herself out of her partner’s arms and came up to



where I stood. She was all animation—enchanted to see me—had interrupted a most delightful waltz that she might thank me at once for so promptly complying with her request—I had been very intimate with her dear Ruthven, had I not? (adjusting some of the roses in her hair while she spoke)—she was tormented about that little property in the north by a horrid lawyer; but to-morrow would be time enough for business—the next dance was a polka; would I be introduced to her sister, Miss Maxwell?”

“And you stayed?”

“Yes! you see I had been a year in Egypt since Ruthven’s death; my memory was too keen; it would be outacting Hamlet to affect any gravity then—we must take the world as we find it. I stayed; only I danced the polka with Mrs. Ruthven instead of her sister.”

“I am very glad you showed such good sense,” cried Lady Oswestry; “what would you have? It would be very unreasonable (don’t you think so, Regina?) to suppose that a woman is to be constant for ever and ever to the memory of the dear

departed! The fair widow is now on her promotion. I, for one, wish her success."

"What does Miss Howard say to that?" inquired Lord Oswestry.

Regina had meant not to answer Lady Oswestry's casual address, but this direct attack she could not pass over.

"I don't think it unreasonable at all to expect a woman to be constant in such a case," she replied, with a clear and somewhat dry intonation; "for, when a man is dead, he cannot change either."

"And you believe, very justly, that is your only security," said Lord Oswestry, much amused.

Sir Alban rose hastily.

"Is that enough for your Christmas book, Lady Oswestry?" he asked.

"Oh! I shall wait for the *dénouement*! I shall see whether you marry the widow."

"Really, if your ladyship pours such dark forebodings on my head, the sooner I leave your presence the better."

"But you have not told us yet how you sped with the lawyer?"

“I set a fiercer shark upon him, who worried him off his prey—in other words, a sharper lawyer.” As he spoke he left the room, accompanied by Lord Oswestry.

“I can’t quite forgive you, Regina, for not turning that man’s head,” said Lady Oswestry, as they in turn rose to get ready for their journey. “If I were single I think I would try—for he’s really worth it.”

That evening the whole party were strolling on the terrace at Piermont, by the light of the moon. Regina was leaning on the arm of the Duchess of Clareville, and discussing with her in a low tone her plans for the morrow.

Lord Henry, who had arrived at Piermont in time for dinner, joined them every now and then.

“Do you know, Miss Howard,” he said, “all this reminds me of some old play I have read; where the lady gives a grand entertainment, and at the end of it declares the name of her fortunate suitor, which Oswestry says you mean to do?”

“I beg your pardon—I do not!” said Regina decidedly.

“I am going to have an archery *fête*, because (turning to the duchess), when I was young and foolish, I used to long to be asked to the archery parties some neighbours were in the habit of giving, and I never was invited.”

“And are they coming to yours?” asked Lord Henry.

“Yes! I begged Lord Oswestry to include them.”

“Miss Howard, do you know Winny Hopper is quite hurt you have not invited her? She says she always loved that dear girl, but that you never properly took to her in return.”

“She is quite right in the last part of her assertion,” said Regina; “besides, I could not have her, because she did not behave well to Lady Oswestry.”

“Oh, Miss Howard! that evening—shall you ever forget it?” cried Lord Henry, laughing. “I never enjoyed any thing more. I reminded her of it the other day, and she blushed and sidled like a heroine out of the *Spectator*.”

“And, pray, how came you to be in her society, if one might ask?”

“Oh! we are quite intimate,” he replied, without the least embarrassment. “I happened to find myself in that neighbourhood lately, for trout-fishing, and I called upon her—the fact is, I wanted some luncheon. I found her the most hospitable old girl in the world. She asked me to come every day, and I did. I found she had got a mother who kept up the proprieties, you know.”

They were going in to the drawing-room; Regina lingered behind. Presently the harp sounded from the music-room, then the piano—Lady Oswestry and the Duchess were playing together. The delightful sounds, the streaming moonlight, the intoxicating odour of the orange blossoms, soothed her nerves: she stood, with her hands slightly clasped, the perfumed breeze just fluttering her white muslin dress, looking over the low terrace-wall into the park beyond. Not a leaf stirred upon the large drooping trees far below in the valley—they stood drinking in the silver light in all the silence of absolute repose; while, on the terrace, the orange leaves were rustling

over her head, and the boughs of the pink acacias in the flower-garden were quivering in the wind. The events of the next day filled her mind to overflowing—she tried in vain to dismiss them from her thoughts. She felt a little uneasy, too, about Mr. Reynard. She had, with Lord Oswestry's sanction, written Mr. Reynard a few lines, saying that, as he had been unable during the last three years to find any means of forwarding the plan that was nearest her heart, she had felt justified in taking another opinion, by means of which she trusted to be at last successful. To this communication Mr. Reynard presented his compliments, and begged to thank Miss Howard for her candour, while he wished to be allowed to say that, on the day of her coming of age, he hoped to add his congratulations to those of her friends, and to prove that he had not been wholly unmindful of her interests.

This last clause puzzled her. She had by this time learned too much of Mr. Reynard to expect any thing good from that quarter; but in what way he could injure her, she was at a loss to imagine.



He might forge something she thought—some will, some deed of gift. She knew so little of law that he might cheat her in a hundred ways—but then there was Lord Oswestry, who would not see her wronged; and as for Sir Alban, it was really not her business to watch over his interests. When once she had surrendered Beyminstre, it would matter very little to her into whose hands it passed.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a footstep, and, turning a little towards the person who drew near, she found herself face to face with Sir Alban.

“Lady Oswestry has sent me to you, Miss Howard,” he said, “to beg that you will not take cold. Let me put on your shawl.”

“I am much obliged to you both,” said Regina, accepting the shawl he had brought with him; “but I never take cold.”

“Were you star-gazing?” he asked; “there are a good many visible for so bright a night.”

“No! I was thinking of things the most in the world opposed to stars—of lawyers!”

“ You will have a fine day to-morrow, Miss Howard.”

“ Yes—I think it will be fine.”

“ It is a day to which many have looked forward with great interest.”

“ I suppose so ; any thing of a *fête* is interesting in the country.”

“ It will be interesting to me, because they tell me I shall then learn who is to be master of Beyminstre.”

“ You will, Sir Alban !”

“ Its mistress is, in my thoughts, so unparalleled, that I may be excused, perhaps, some curiosity as to the person she means to honour with her hand.”

Regina laughed somewhat scornfully. “ Women sometimes have strange fancies,” she remarked.

“ You could have none that would not do you credit,” he said.

“ By the way,” said Regina, forcing herself to speak easily ; “ I have long wished to restore to you this ring—but I have never found an opportunity. If you should chance to have preserved the lock of hair you received at the same time,

perhaps you will be so good as to destroy it. If it is lost, that will do as well."

She held out the opal ring as she spoke.

"I will do so," he replied, taking the ring: "you have a right to be obeyed."

"I suppose Lady Oswestry expects me," she said, as she walked towards the entrance.

"Miss Howard! Regina!" said Sir Alban, following her; "I hope you understand me?"

"Perfectly!" she replied with a slight touch of irony in her voice; "never was any one more intelligible."

He drew back as if hurt.

"You must long have been disposed to allow," Regina continued calmly, "that my grandmother saw more clearly into our future than we could do ourselves, and we have only to congratulate ourselves that an inclination, never very strong—I mean," she added, replying to a negative gesture of her companion, "a regard not strong enough to withstand the force of circumstances—a liking that could vanish before the will of a capricious old man—should have been fettered by no engage-

ment, and should have been allowed to fade out on both sides without the awkwardness of a formal rupture."

"And you will not tell me," he said after a few moments' silence, "who has replaced me in your heart."

They were now just before the open windows of the music-room, and the broad glare of the lamps fell upon her elegant figure, and touched her delicate features, pallid with that suppressed excitement which lends no blush to the cheek. She turned again to her companion.

"Sir Alban," she said with a quiet smile, "tomorrow will soon be here!"

## CHAPTER VI.

It is come at last—the day for which she has thirsted with such feverish hope. Now, nothing can step between her and her dearest wish. “Unless I die before night,” Regina thinks, “nothing on earth can baffle me.” And she looks in the glass as her maid dresses her, and a slight touch of fever gives her such an appearance of health and energy, that she smiles at the alternative.

There is a tap at the door—she recognises the sound of Lady Oswestry’s flexible fingers, and goes to open herself.

“Good gracious! how lovely we look!” cried her ladyship starting back. Then, embracing Regina, she congratulated her on her coming of age.

“Nothing can make you look handsomer,” she added; “but you must wear this brooch to remind

you of Piermont while you are absent. It must not be for long, for none of us are inclined to do without you."

And with much kindness of manner she fastened a beautiful Turquoise brooch into Regina's white dress.

Then Regina, with many blushes, offered Lady Oswestry a magnificent ruby bracelet as a memorial, "not so much of the day," she said, "as of the many happy months she had spent under their roof;" and Lady Oswestry cried a little, and quite worshipped the bracelet, and Regina fairly burst into tears, and cried a good deal.

"Oh, dear! this won't do," cried Lady Oswestry, "when we think of all we have to go through to-day; and here comes that torment of a child with a nosegay as big as himself. However it is your fault, bringing him down with us."

"It was a very old promise, Lady Oswestry," pleaded Regina, holding out her hand to welcome Lord Exmoor.

"I have brought you some flowers," said the child, as soon as his mother had left the room.



“And I am very much obliged to you,” she answered, making him a low courtesy as she took the bouquet.

He stood watching her while she put on her point-lace bonnet and selected her gloves—at last he said, “Regina, I am very unhappy!”

“But you must not be unhappy to-day, Exmoor; you must win the gold arrow at the archery, and enjoy yourself very much.”

“Will you promise me one thing?”

“Well—yes! I suppose I may promise any thing you are likely to ask.”

“Promise that you will not marry my cousin, Henry Montresor.”

“With all my heart, dear little Exmoor!” cried Regina, bursting into a merry laugh. “I will promise you more—I will promise that he shall never even make me an offer.”

“I love you better than any of them,” said the child, “and yet you never think of me.”

“I think of you very often, naughty Exmoor!” said Regina, leaning her cheek on his fair head.

“If you would wait for me, the time would soon

pass," said the child with great earnestness; "I shall be nine next month—and you will be always young."

"Dear little Exmoor!" she replied, "you are mistaken. When you are of age I shall be still single, if I live; for I mean never to marry. But I shall be a sallow old woman; and I shall hear with much pleasure that Lord Exmoor is engaged to the belle of the season."

"You will see if I change," he said, firmly.

"Now you shall lead me down-stairs," she returned, laughing.

The carriages are waiting at the door. Lord Oswestry is to drive Regina—that is all she knows about the arrangement. She has not been down to breakfast, and the duchess meets her at the foot of the stairs, and wishes her joy with a peculiar meaning in her loving eyes and in the pressure of her soft hand.

She is one of the few who know how this day is likely to end. Behind her comes Sir Alban, pale and composed, but less reserved than usual. He holds out his hand, and congratulates her in

a cordial voice. This makes her more nervous than any thing, and she hurries to the carriage with my lord.

She is to go straight from Beyminstre to Holmwood, after the *fête*, and from thence to the Lakes the next day, with Edith, who is now pronounced fit for the journey.

It is a glorious day ! The blue sky lightly flecked here and there with transparent clouds, the air hot with sunshine, and sweet with flowers and new mown grass. Lord Oswestry drives very fast ; the hedges and the green fresh turf at the roadside whirl past her—sometimes the line is broken by a tethered horse grazing upon the bank—sometimes a cool pond shaded with willows seems to flit beside them. Lord Oswestry speaks sometimes, but Regina is thinking over and over what she is to say and do, and she answers very much at random. At last my lord's outriders tear forward to open the ancient gates of the park entrance, and they are rushing down the long avenue towards the house. She feels, as if with a new sense, how stately look the old mansion and

the older trees ; her eye takes in the rapid river and the drooping cedars on the velvet bank ; and she feels, with a thrill of pride, that all this is worth resigning, and that she gives this noble place into the hands of a fit successor. She catches a glimpse of tents, and flags, and moving crowds, through the leafy branches ; and, as they draw near the house, the common people, who are feasted in the park to-day, and who have assembled round the entrance, to catch a sight of their new mistress, raise a shout as they recognise the Oswestry liveries.

“ Bow to them,” whispers Lord Oswestry, as he hands her out.

She starts, as if aroused from a dream, and bows hastily from side to side.

“ Do you repent ? ” he asks in the same tone.

“ No ! ” she replies with energy ; “ but I wish it over.”

The company are assembling in the great hall—Lord Oswestry leads her from group to group, and kindly whispers to her who the people are, and what she ought to say to them.

He reminds her that Colonel St. Aix has lent the band of his regiment for the occasion, and she is enabled to say something civil when that warrior approaches. He suggests to her that the broad lady with light hair is Mrs. Chillingworth, and that they have met before; and she hastens to resign both hands to the grasp of that affectionate friend, who raises and depresses them in cadence for several minutes; while she offers a little congratulatory address to Regina on her happy prospects, including a slight dissertation on the transitory nature of human events, and on the blessing of a good husband—whose character she had known from childhood: which last remark might seem to apply to Mr. Chatham Chillingworth, who stands behind his mother all the time, looking rather hot and foolish.

But she needs no reminding when she draws near a little modest group—standing as much alone as if they were upon a small desert island—consisting of the whole Winter family. She hurries towards them with outstretched hands and smiles of welcome, and Lord Oswestry shows marked politeness

to old Mr. Winter, and tells him that he has heard much of his beautiful organ-playing.

Mrs. Winter, you may be sure, remembers this all the days of her life; and walks proudly about in a warm velvet cloak, the gift of Regina when she first went to Piermont.

At last Lord Oswestry suggests (for Regina has quite forgotten the programme of the day) that the archery shall begin; and a group of young ladies, in plumed hats and green jackets, collect together, with the same number of young gentlemen, bearing bows and quivers.

"Who will you have to escort you?" asked Lord Oswestry. "Queens choose their partners, you know—you are a queen to-day!"

"A queen about to abdicate," she replied. "Oh! I had rather keep with you, only of course that would not be right—you must take some person of rank." And she withdrew her hand from his arm.

"Not at all!" he said, replacing it. "These parties are always *sans façon*; and I have every right to look after my ward—you are so, you know, till to-morrow."



He leads her down into the park, and little Exmoor makes his way to her, and walks beside her, holding her hand. She sees Colonel St. Aix walking next to Lord Exmoor, and she believes he is bending across the child, and talking to her all the way. Exmoor's grasp tightens upon her hand every moment, as if he wishes to withdraw her attention from so powerful a rival. Sir John Lawler comes up to speak, and she cannot remember whether he made her an offer, or Mr. Poole. She longs to ask Lord Oswestry, as if it mattered; and then her attention is absorbed by the green and gold pouch which one of the young ladies wears, and which sways so prettily from her side as she takes aim at the target. She is to give the prizes when the shooting is over, and she sits looking anxiously at the basket in which they are ranged, hoping that she shall bestow them in order, and not disgrace herself at this her last appearance. She looks about for Sir Alban, and sees that he is standing very near, talking to the duchess, who is seated among the spectators, and she catches his eye, fixed on her with such intense

anxiety that she feels her colour rise. One of the guests remarks that Miss Howard is dressed like a bride, and she recollects that she is all in white, except the lilac flowers in her bonnet. Another person wonders who is likely to be the bridegroom, and she sees Sir Alban start, and throw a restless glance among the gentlemen standing round her chair.

At last the shooting is over; the prizes are given; the sunlight no longer dances through the trees; the shadows lengthen. Regina goes with Lord Oswestry into a tent to eat ices, and then the company, taking advantage of the military band, begin to dance. She sits watching them, and growing more and more nervous as supper-time draws near. The tent is boarded, and lit with Chinese lanterns, and the young people find it delicious—others venture to think, but scarcely to say, that it is very hot. In the middle of a galope, while Regina as she sits is every now and then swathed in a white tunic, or veiled in a pink skirt, belonging to some light-footed dancer, she becomes aware that Colonel St. Aix is making

passionate love to her. She has been answering at intervals so very graciously, without having an idea what he was saying, that she is almost frightened lest he should have offered his hand and been already accepted. But she is presently relieved when she finds the offer is only *coming*; and when, after a very high-flown description of her angelic beauty, he declares in rather strong language that he means to perish if she will not smile on his destiny, and expresses his positive aversion to her large possessions, Regina's whole mind is filled with one anxious hope—that she is not, she trusts, looking quite so red and hot as her gallant lover does at this moment.

“You don't like my possessions, Colonel St. Aix?” she says almost at random. “Be assured I mean to bestow them where they will be very highly valued—valued far above my love, or any such airy trifle.”

Sir Alban heard her; he looked more perplexed than ever—but her speech must have somehow touched his conscience, for the colour flew into his face.

And now they pair off to go to supper, which is laid in the great hall.

Lord Oswestry leads Regina, Lord Henry takes the Duchess, and Sir Alban Lady Oswestry; Mr. James Brand is on the other side of the heiress, his brother the clergyman not far off. The rest of the company pour into their places, and "the table is full."

The band plays, the table glitters—silver and gorgeous flowers and cut glass interspersed with all the elegant devices of a modern feast.

Regina sits at the head of the table, pale and silent—eating and drinking nothing; her hands growing colder, her breath more short. She keeps her eyes on the clock beneath the music gallery, the hands of which are slowly travelling towards twelve.

Suddenly she touches Lord Oswestry's sleeve with her chilly fingers; he rises at once, and begs to propose the health of the "Heiress of Beyminstre." It is drunk with all the honours, the band plays something—she does not hear what; it is all confusion, music, and cheering for a few minutes—and

then all her fright and agitation seem to clear off at once. She rises up slowly, her flashing eyes traversed the long line on either side, as if to discover that all were present; and then, raising her voice, she says distinctly—

“I now declare that I refuse to assume the name and arms of Willingham; and therefore that the estate of Beyminstre reverts to the heir-at-law, Sir Alban Willingham!”

Her voice had kept its pitch hitherto, but now there is a check for an instant—a sudden blanching of her face and lips—a faintness, struggled against and overcome; and then, bending her graceful head towards him with perfect self-possession, she adds firmly, “To whom I wish health and happiness.”

The lawyer, pointing to the clock, adds:—

“I call all to witness that Regina Howard has forfeited her claim. It is twelve o’clock!”

“I thank you, madam!” says a voice from the doorway—“I am Sir Alban Willingham, at your service!”

And, closely followed by Mr. Reynard, a haggard ruffian stalked up the hall.

One dizzy moment Regina saw and heard nothing—she felt that Lord Oswestry was holding her hand, and unconsciously she grasped his, as if to steady her brain. She saw Sir Alban turn white as ashes, and stagger as if struck, and she felt that this was no impostor—that it was the ruffian, Colonel Willingham, whose death had been too hastily believed!

“It’s awkward!” said the villainous-looking guest; “I’m afraid the sacrifice was meant for a younger man—the lady looks poorly upon it.”

“Stand aside, sir!” said Lord Oswestry with dignity; “the lady is about to leave the table.”

“I have done my errand here,” said Regina, with a calmness that surprised herself. “It is no longer concern or interest of mine to whom the inheritance falls.”

Then Lord Oswestry drew her hand through his arm, and led her quickly out of the hall.

The duchess followed close behind. As soon as they reached the entrance, Lord Oswestry turned into a little room that opened from the vestibule, and placed Regina on a sofa.



“You will be quiet here,” he said, “while I order the carriage. I leave Miss Howard in your kind care, duchess; fasten the door till I return—we want no condolences.”

“We will talk it over by and by, when you are calmer,” said the duchess, leaning tenderly over Regina.

Her hands were clasped over her face, her head bent down to her knees—if ever she felt *despair*, it was at that moment.

“What have I done?—what have I done?” she repeated over and over.

“You have done the noblest, the most loving action in the world!” replied the duchess; “and you have failed, as brave men sometimes fail, who peril their heart’s blood upon some great achievement. What then?”

“Oh! I have failed worse than that!” cried Regina, lifting up her pallid face. “Had it been life, I could say with you, ‘What then?’ But all the wrongs and injuries of so many years bequeathed to me to set to rights, and I to make one great mistake—oh! not to be retrieved.

His mortal foe, whom he shut out with so much care, fixed here for ever by my fault—oh! what a fate is this!”

Her tears broke forth at last—her wild, uncontrolled weeping.

“You have done your duty,” returned the duchess in her soothing voice; “let the rest go! You deny yourself the splendid position offered to you—with wonderful self-denial you reject the means of raising yourself to the first rank in the kingdom—you bide your time, and, by an ingenious quibble that one less patient and resolved would have overlooked, you restore the succession to the lawful heir; and to see his greatest foe, as you rightly call him, step in and grasp the gift—there’s something hidden in all this, some good we cannot fathom! You have a noble heart—take courage; the fortune’s gone, but wealth is not all you could bestow—he may be happy yet.”

“I loved him! There—look down on me!” cried Regina, throwing wide her arms with a sudden gesture of despair. “He won my heart, and then the fortune came, and he flung me off! His

pride, you see—his pride ! He never loved me, and I watched and waited to give it up, and thought—oh fool ! no matter what I thought !”

“ Regina, dearest,” said the duchess, taking her hands, “ when you are calmer, and remember what you have said, don’t let that distress you—don’t think it shall ever be breathed beyond these walls—you can trust me, can’t you ? for, Regina, I knew it before.”

“ Yes—yes !” she whispered, trying to still the convulsive trembling that shook her all over.

“ Poor child ! compose yourself, they are coming,” said the duchess opening the door.

“ The carriage is ready—to Piermont, I think,” said Lord Oswestry, glancing at Regina.

“ Better, I think,” returned the duchess.

“ No—Holmwood !” said Regina, trying to come forward, but she swayed round and fell powerless to the floor.

“ To Holmwood, then,” said the duchess quickly ; “ I will go with her.”

She did not quite lose her senses—she felt them lift her into the carriage—she was conscious

of a sharp perfume, like aromatic vinegar—she knew that her head lay on the soft bosom of the duchess, and that Lady Oswestry's warm, gentle fingers were removing the hair from her temples—she heard the dull noise of the carriage, too, and felt something of an uneasy posture in the corner; then an aching wish for darkness, and rest, and for silence, unbroken even by the soft murmurs of her kind companions.

At last Holmwood is reached. The carriage sets down Regina and the duchess, and carries back Lady Oswestry; and Edith, tearful and wondering, receives her friend, much in the same enfeebled condition as when she first claimed the shelter of the cottage. But she does not know that the gentle, lovely woman, who so kindly dismisses her to rest, and who takes her place with a mother's tenderness beside Regina's pillow, is no less a person than the celebrated Duchess of Clareville. So Regina lies—the dim watchlight burning on the table, every thing silent round her; looking up into her friend's sweet face, until her heavy eyelids close, and she forgets her sorrows in sleep.

## CHAPTER VII.

REGINA'S first impression, on waking in the morning, was a sense of relief that she could hardly explain to herself. She could not but allow that the re-appearance of Colonel Willingham was a painful and disappointing circumstance; but the fact, that her harassing connection with the estate of Beyminstre was for ever closed, there was a freedom in the thought which almost consoled her for the rest. She would not allow herself to feel for Alban—she repeated again and again that it was worse than weakness to allow herself to think about him—that the past *was* past, in the fullest sense of the term; and that it was utterly impossible he should hold any place in her future.

The duchess was surprised when they met in the morning—for she had gone to bed as soon as

she had seen her young friend asleep—to observe the calm and resolute expression of her countenance.

“You were most kind to bear with me, dear duchess,” Regina said; “but I shall give you no more trouble—my weakness is past.”

“I am glad of it, my love, if it make you happier; but I am afraid that our weaknesses are so completely a part of ourselves, that we cannot feel quite comfortable without them.”

Régina looked very brave, and began to make the breakfast.

“I should not much wonder if you were to receive a visit to-day,” remarked the duchess.

“From whom?” asked Regina, starting.

“From the disinherited knight—Mr. Willingham, must I call him?”

“Oh, no!” said Regina. “He knows too well what I think—we had a few words on the terrace that evening, after you had gone in.”

“And I was hoping that those few words were of a conciliatory nature,” said the duchess.

“No! I tell you truly, duchess, that I have



worn out all those feelings—or he has worn them out for me ; women are not to endure every thing, I suppose, without resentment—and, when time disposes them to forgive, I assure you very heartily, judging from my own impressions, it disposes them also to forget.”

There was something a little doubting in the duchess’s smile, especially as she traced a certain nervous eagerness in Regina’s manner when there came a violent ring at the outer gate. It was evident that she did not quite disbelieve the possibility of a visit of more than common interest. Yet she looked relieved when Lord and Lady Oswestry were announced.

“ You dear, deranged, loveable creature ! ” cried Lady Oswestry, embracing Regina—“ what could possess you ? what have you been dreaming about ? It was very grand ; yet I wish with all my heart that you had kept the property yourself. Now, tell me—how are you ? ”

“ Very well, thanks to the kind care of the duchess,” answered Regina ; “ and all the better for being freed of Beyminstre.”

“What shall we do with her, duchess?” asked Lord Oswestry.

“I should like nothing better than to decide her future lot,” replied her grace; “but this young lady, I suspect, is likely to act for herself on every occasion.”

Regina blushed a little, for she could not help understanding the allusion to Lord Ellesdon.

“As for poor little Exmoor, I thought he never would have left off crying last night,” said Lady Oswestry.

“I wish you had brought him; I wish he was going with me to the Lakes!” cried Regina.

“We shall keep him as a decoy to bring you back to Piermont,” said Lord Oswestry.

“But I have not heard yet how the young man bears his reverses,” remarked the duchess.

“For that, you would be a much more clever person than any of us, (which I have no doubt, my dear duchess, you are,)” exclaimed Lady Oswestry, “if you could glean the faintest shadow of an idea of what Alban Willingham thinks, feels, or means on any subject! I had naturally some curiosity to

learn what he thought of it all, and I asked him last night, if Miss Howard was not an angel? and, would you believe it, he said 'Yes!' and not a word more; and I asked him, if he was not astonished to see the colonel? and he said 'Yes!' again, and then went out of the room."

"Well, well!" said Lord Oswestry, "considering that it was then two o'clock in the morning, and that he had only waited to learn from you how you had left Miss Howard, I think a man might be excused for taking his candle and walking off to bed."

"The best thing he could do, I think," said Regina quickly.

"You see, Miss Howard, what it is to irritate a lawyer!" remarked Lord Oswestry; "it seems that this Sir Ralph Willingham has been some time in this country, lurking about London."

"I'm glad his name is not Alban, however," exclaimed Regina, stopping short when it was too late, and blushing beautifully.

Lord Oswestry glanced across at the duchess, smiled slightly, and went on.

“His name is Ralph Alban Willingham, Miss Howard; and he chose to make himself known by the latter appellation, just to turn the phrase, I imagine. He seems to have been aware that Mr. Reynard was an unscrupulous person, and so applied to him, in the first instance, to learn whether his brother’s will did not leave some loop-hole for contesting your right to the estate. Your announcement, I suppose, opened Mr. Reynard’s eyes to the step you were about to take, for the simple reason that he knew all along you might do so: he, no doubt, thought the chance worth a journey down to Beyminstre,—and there’s a plain explanation of a very dramatic scene, which could not have been better timed if it had been rehearsed for a twelvemonth. But I don’t like to see you look grave upon it, Miss Howard,” he added with much kindness, “you are just where you wished to be with regard to Beyminstre, and surely you have yielded sufficiently to the prejudices of poor Sir Herbert to acquit your conscience.”

“Oh, yes, yes! I am content, since it must be so,” she replied.

“Sir Ralph is at open warfare with his son, of course,” said Lord Oswestry; “his first order was to desire that he might never be admitted to the house—and, unfortunately, it now can never be his, since the entail is cut off, and Sir Ralph may leave it where he pleases. It seems he has brought over with him a half-caste Peruvian woman, to whom he is much attached, and to whom it is said he is married: but that is doubtful. So much my man Edmonds picked up last night—don’t you think he was very industrious?”

The duchess saw Regina’s hands clasped tightly together, with the effort to preserve her calmness, and answered for her—

“We are much obliged to Mr. Edmonds; we all feel a little curious about this *Revenant*; I don’t think there is an English word for a returned spirit. But do you think it is past all hope that the father and son may become reconciled?”

“Altogether!” he replied; “Alban could never overlook Sir Ralph’s treatment of his mother. No! he will go to India as soon as his appointment is confirmed; and I don’t think he can do

better—he is highly considered, and is sure to get on.”

“But I hope,” interposed Lady Oswestry, “I am not keeping away that silly little goose, Edith Carleton?”

“No—she is still an invalid, and does not come down to breakfast,” said Regina.

“Has she overcome her *penchant* for that good-for-nothing Henry?”

“Oh, yes! Lady Oswestry; I believe so.”

“He was wild to accompany us this morning, that he might throw himself *again* at your feet.”

“Lady Oswestry!”

“He said he had never seen any thing so beautiful as your countenance and manner when you renounced the estate; he declared he had rather win your hand than succeed to Beyminstre himself.”

“My empty hand!” said Regina, laughing.

“Not so empty!” returned Lady Oswestry. “My dear, if at your age I had possessed twelve hundred a year, I should have been Lady Henry Montresor—living at Boulogne, I suppose, with two maids and a man.”



They were going over the house, which her ladyship had desired to see, when she gave utterance to this little bit of candour.

“Happily, the fates interposed!” she added; “and now I see him as he really is—a man not worth the sacrifice of a single yard of ribbon—a single string of beads! Not that I have any wish to influence your choice—but you may tell little Carleton that.”

“You may be sure that I will impress it upon her,” said Regina, laughing.

“On my word you have a very pretty garden!” pursued Lady Oswestry, strolling out of the glass door; “and there’s a charming seat under the mulberry-tree! Rural felicity, my dear! I picture you and the curate seated here about sunset—he is fat, and therefore no doubt given to sighing.”

“Pray, spare him, Lady Oswestry; he is an especial favourite of mine.”

“I will, my dear; and the more readily as I observe him coming up the walk. I am glad to see that he takes off his hat like a gentleman.”

• It may be observed in passing, that Mr. Brand

always did take off his hat. He thought that, as English clergymen could eat the dinners and join in the gaieties of their parishioners, they should treat the women as *ladies*, and not as *penitents*, and shew them the civilities to which they have a right.

Regina got up to meet him, and Lady Oswestry said, laughing: "I will leave you to your little flirtation—the more readily as I detect a trifling show of coquetry in our excellent duchess towards my lord. He is gathering her strawberries, I observe—I don't see why I should not have some, too."

And, returning Mr. Brand's salutation, she went laughing off to the other side of the garden.

"Well, Miss Howard, it has been a disappointment," he said, beginning at once with what they were both thinking about; "but you have the rare satisfaction of having done your best."

"I do believe," she remarked, "that if there chances to be one person, more than another, whose death seems desirable to all parties, and whose existence is productive of very serious inconvenience, that person is sure to live for ever."

\* “Shewing, I think, Miss Howard, how subordinate these vexations and contradictions, serious though they appear to us, are held by Infinite Wisdom to the education they are intended to bestow on the soul of man.”

“I wish at this moment, Mr. Brand, I were a Catholic!”

“I hope, Miss Howard, that you and I, too, are Catholics!

“Oh, Mr. Brand! I thought you more of a literary character.”

“How so, Miss Howard?”

“I thought you too well read in the literature of your country to use the word Catholic in that sense: shew me a history of any note, or a work of fiction worthy to be quoted (such as Sir Walter Scott’s), in which the word Catholic is not perpetually used in contradistinction to Protestant, to designate the two great divisions of the Christian world. Really, the impudence of some churchmen (I don’t say this for you), in speaking of the Catholics as of a paltry gang of dissenters, instead of a priesthood who preserved the Scrip-

tures, and the worship of Christ, and the holy sacraments, through all the ignorant tumult of the middle ages, I cannot strongly enough speak my contempt for their ingratitude, nor my conviction that they must be very uncertain of their own claims to belief and respect, before they would insult a great church with the slang of angry schoolboys, and nicknames that even schoolboys would look down upon as childish weapons!"

"Oh, Miss Howard—Miss Howard!" said Mr. Brand, laughing, "I shall live to see you a Carmelite nun, I am afraid; though, I assure you, I need nothing to convince me that abuse is *no* weapon. But may I ask why you wished just now that you were a Roman Catholic?"

"Only that, as I acted from mixed motives in this affair—and one *angry* motive I confess—I should pick up some consolation from a confessor respecting my failure; now, as things are, I failed gratis!"

"You know how to make me laugh, Miss Howard; but, seriously, will you tell me what motive you had, that you disapprove on reflection, and I will try if I can extract some comfort for

you. You don't give us fair-play if you treat us with less candour than you would a director."

"Well, then, I must tell you in confidence," she paused and looked mischievous, "that I am very much afraid of ghosts—and, if Sir Herbert were to haunt me, what should I do?"

"Now, Miss Howard, you are not serious."

"I am, indeed! Poor man! he looked like a ghost when he was alive, and what he can look like now—I assure you a white window curtain, last night, gave me very serious misgivings!"

"You are quite as bad as ever, Miss Howard."

"And you are as good as ever, Mr. Brand," said Regina quite affectionately; "you don't take offence at my nonsense. Now, tell me something about Winny Hopper—something amusing."

"And tell me, too," cried Lady Oswestry, coming up at the moment; "I am very much interested about Miss Hopper."

"I have no news to give your ladyship from that quarter, except that a relation of yours has been lately very assiduous in his visits there," replied Mr. Brand.

“Could you believe it of Henry!” exclaimed Lady Oswestry; “what *can* be his motive? Do people think, Mr. Brand, that he is paying his addresses to that wonderful female?”

“People—that is, the village people—undoubtedly *do* think so!” replied Mr. Brand; “but I will confess to your ladyship that I do not share in their belief: only, when a gentleman is a daily visiter at the home of a single lady—when he is seen walking out with her—when he goes with her to church——”

“It does look suspicious!” interrupted Lady Oswestry. “Well! if he likes it, *I* have no objection; only I don’t undertake to pay their wine merchant, that’s all.”

“Mr. Brand does not understand the allusion,” said Regina, blushing and laughing.

“Perhaps Mr. Brand has never seen the fair Winny in—in—what shall I say, Regina?—*in-ebriated!*”

“Oh, never—Lady Oswestry!” exclaimed Mr. Brand, quite startled.



"We have seen her cry, too—haven't we, Regina?" pursued Lady Oswestry.

"So has Mr. Brand," answered Regina.

"Yes—I admit that!" he replied.

"The carriage is waiting," said Lord Oswestry, coming up with the duchess, "and we have a long drive before us."

"How I dislike to see you all go away!" cried Regina, looking round on her friends.

"We only follow your example, Miss Howard, in going away," said Lord Oswestry; "however, before we start, perhaps you will fix the day for your coming to Piermont."

"Remember that Ellesdon Castle comes first," said the duchess, taking her hand: "it is just in your road from Keswick, and I shall try to persuade Lord and Lady Oswestry to meet you there."

"That will be pleasant," cried Regina; "but I have done with looking forward. I *hope* I shall go to Ellesdon, and I *hope* I shall go on to Piermont; but every thing seems uncertain to me *now*."

"Isn't it edifying?" exclaimed Lady Oswestry, looking archly at Mr. Brand; "a young beauty,

well born and well endowed—to be sure she can have no prospects!”

They were walking down the garden, and Regina found herself next to Lord Oswestry.

“I have hardly had time to say a word to you, Miss Howard,” he said: “I trust you will not let this unlucky business weigh on your spirits. For my cousin, you know, he is only where he was before.”

“Oh, yes! for him—but I cannot help thinking of Sir Herbert; and there’s something awful to me in the prosperity of a wicked man like Sir Ralph.”

“After all, you see, Miss Howard, there are better things in this world even than houses and lands.”

“Yes! for women, but not for men, Lord Oswestry.”

“I am sure, Miss Howard, that is not Alban’s way of thinking.”

“Pardon me, Lord Oswestry, I believe he sets more than a common value upon them. I was formerly a little acquainted with him, during his mother’s life, and I speak ‘*avec connaissance de*

*cause.* But I own to you, I don't mean to mourn because Sir Alban is not enriched; I did what I could to satisfy him, because I thought it just: he had better now conciliate his father, and see if he can get the property that way."

"Shall I tell him that is your opinion?"

"By no means as coming from me. I have no wish to send a message to Mr. Willingham."

"You would not object to meeting him?"

"Not at all more now than before; but, when I visit Piermont, he will have left the country, I suppose."

"It is clear, Miss Howard," said Lord Oswestry, smiling; "that you will manage your own affairs without my help."

That brief smile, gone in an instant, always brought Alban to her mind. Something now touched her more than usual—her colour rose, and her eyes filled with tears.

"I hope I have said nothing to hurt you," he added.

"Don't look at me," she said quickly, in her wayward manner.

He smiled again, and turned to speak to the duchess.

“As for affairs, I have none,” she went on to say; “if I have any, I shall come and trouble you about them, as I said I would—but Becky, the woman there in the white apron, pays my weekly bills, and that’s all the business I have, or can foresee at present.”

“And you have nothing to say to any one at Piermont?”

“Yes! my love to dear little Exmoor. Farewell!”

She stood at the gate, with Mr. Brand, to see her friends off. Lady Oswestry leaned from the window, and directed her arch eyes, full of mischief, towards Regina and her companion, and shook her head in mock reproach.

“And now we are to lose *you*, Miss Howard,” said Mr. Brand; “when are we to expect you at Holmwood again?”

“When I have paid all these grand visits—unless Miss Carleton should require a milder air for the winter. Ah! it is not the *poor* alone who want care and kindness.”

“Why, you *are* losing no time! Here is your brougham coming round—what a pretty carriage!”

“Is it not? Lord Oswestry chose it. And here is Edith, ready dressed—I wish she may enjoy our excursion half as much as I mean to do.”

Edith was coming down-stairs with a cautious air, as if not sure that the guests were gone. She looked very pallid, but stronger than when Regina had seen her last, and there was about her whole air that stillness and composure which gave to her beauty the charm it wanted in her happier days—the dignity of sorrow.

“Come down, Edith, you are not afraid of Mr. Brand!” called Regina.

And with a little smile, a little blush, that became her infinitely, Edith hastened forward and greeted Mr. Brand.

“There will be a class ready for you when you come back, Miss Carleton,” he said, as he handed her into the carriage.

“Don’t take it, Edith!” cried Regina; “for if you do, a dear lady I know will scratch your eyes out.”

“I will protect Miss Carleton’s eyes,” said Mr. Brand, smiling.

“Then I’ll have half her class—we will raise a mutiny in Miss Hopper’s camp!” cried Regina; and the brougham whirled from the door, so that Mr. Brand’s remonstrance was inaudible.

He was still standing before the house, though the very dust raised by the carriage wheels had long settled on the ground, when a gentleman, whose face he thought he ought to recollect, rode up at full gallop, and rang violently at the gate.

As he inquired eagerly whether Miss Howard was visible, Mr. Brand thought it only civil to come forward and mention that Miss Howard had just driven from the house, on her way to the Lakes.

“I am much obliged to you,” said the stranger. “Mr. Brand, I believe? My name is Alban Wil-  
lingham.”



## CHAPTER VIII.

“OH, Edith! look!—how beautiful!” cried Regina, leaning from the carriage.

They were travelling from Penrith toward Ullswater, and the lovely Eamont, tumbling and foaming, glanced here and there through the trees on the left of their route.

“Yes! Mr. Brand said we were going to the country of rapid streams—so different from our southern rivers,” replied Edith.

“I’m so glad he advised us to take this way,” added Regina; “we get the first hint of mountains at Penrith, and so come by degrees upon all the wonders of this fairy land. Dear me! what a hill! had we not better get out?”

The coachman, already very cross at the risks her new brougham was running, strongly advised

the ladies to walk up the hill, which he stigmatized as *heathenish*, and the two friends were soon toiling against the steep ascent.

“I hope it will do you no harm!” exclaimed Regina, as soon as they stood again on level ground; “I ought to have thought of that before.”

“Oh, no!” replied Edith, putting back the bright disordered ringlets from her glowing face. “Mr. Brand so strongly recommended me to walk, that I went out twice every day at Holmwood; and I am not tired at all.”

“I never before wished the sun not to shine,” said Regina; “but this *is* heat!”

“Oh! look at that hillside, against which the sheep are feeding to the very top—did you ever see any thing so abrupt? the little stone walls look almost horizontal,” cried Edith.

“And is this Patterdale? are we to stop here, Dixon?” asked Regina of the cross coachman. “What a tiny inn! But come, Edith! every where you find eggs and ham—be hungry, please!”

“I am; but let us first look at the head of the

lake. How curious! the river on that side the bridge, and Ullswater on this."

Their early dinner was soon despatched, and they were on their road along the lovely shores of Ullswater.

"One good thing, there is very little dust," said Edith.

"Don't you long, every minute, to get out and take a sketch?" cried Regina, as she watched the many-tinted mountains changing their outlines at every turn of the road.

"Only it would be so hopeless," said Edith.

"True!" sighed Regina.

"I wish, Miss Howard, I had half your strength," remarked Edith after a pause.

"I wish you had, Miss Carleton," rejoined Regina, laughing; "we would take such interminable walks together."

"I meant strength of mind!" suggested Edith. "I can't help thinking how you have thrown off this disappointment just after the first; and how I have suffered mine to prey upon me, and half wear me out—and even now I feel a sinking at

the heart that never leaves me quite, as if all was over for me in this world."

"My dear Edith, in the first place, I trust that all is just beginning for you—and secondly, allow me to hint that there are many kinds of disappointment. I am free of that abominable place, which certainly, in my life, I shall never set eyes on again; and, therefore, I can very well make up my mind to have got rid of it in a manner that I did not anticipate: after all, I am better pleased now, that Colonel Willingham has come to life. I think Mr. Willingham was very unfit to have Beyminstre."

"Dear me! why?" cried Edith.

"Because his whole life and soul were wrapped up in the place, and people who are worth any thing seldom succeed in their dearest wishes—we have Scripture warrant for that; and I am willing, you see, to admit that he might have his good points, though he was never particularly civil to *me*."

"Poor Mr. Willingham!" said Edith, after a short pause.

"Poor in what, I wonder?" replied her com-

panion; "not poor in spirit, nor so very poor in pocket—for I know he has six hundred a year from his mother, unless he has made away with it, besides his pay, and Lord Oswestry has just obtained for him a capital post in India. Other people with half his means have families to bring up—clergymen, for instance.

"Yes—Mr. Brand has only two hundred a year," remarked Edith pensively.

"There is only one thing I regretted to surrender with that horrid Beyminstre," said Regina, "and that is the living; such a good one, Edith—worth about a thousand a year. I would have given it to Mr. Brand. And now Sir Ralph will sell it to some creature like himself, I dare say—and it will profit nobody."

Edith's glowing face was turned towards her friend. "You would? how kind! how like you!—and Mr. Brand is such a good man! I think he admires you very much."

"I hope he does, because I admire him," laughed Regina; "and it is such a comfort, Edith, to get a little plain admiration, which you know by old

experience is not likely to become inconveniently strong."

Edith looked very much delighted at this statement.

"To be sure," continued Regina, "he is not handsome, that dear Mr. Brand."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Edith, eagerly—and added in a low tone, "I should never think well of a handsome man again."

"Why, that is rather a sweeping clause!" laughed Regina. "I confess I have a slight prejudice in favour of good looks. How frightful all the bad people have been whom I have happened to know! What can be uglier, or more unlike a woman, than that gaunt, sallow, smirking Winny Hopper? and Mr. Morley's hungry face?—Mr. Reynard, again, who certainly might sit for Judas Iscariot with great applause."

Edith laughed.

"And, on the contrary, I have always met with kindness from good-looking people. What a pleasing face has dear old Mr. Winter! and the beautiful duchess, she was kind to me from the



first day we met ; and I am sure I can never feel grateful enough to Lord and Lady Oswestry for their cordial, friendly hospitality."

"Lady Oswestry is very handsome, certainly," said Edith ; "but my lord is so pale."

"Oh, I like that!" Regina went on ; "and he has such a fine expression, and looks so much a gentleman."

"Don't you think he is very like his cousin, Mr. Willingham?" asked Edith.

"There is some resemblance," answered Regina, turning to look out of the window. "Why, Edith, I could be certain that carriage coming to meet us is the Duke of Clareville's. How pleased I should be to get a peep of the lovely duchess! Stop, coachman!"

"How very nice to meet in this way!" cried the duchess, whose carriage drew up at the same moment with that of Miss Howard. "Ellesdon was just wondering whether you were at Keswick."

"Is Lord Ellesdon still in England?" asked Regina.

"Here, Miss Howard!" he replied, leaning across his mother.

"Have you been to the Airy Force?" asked the duchess.

"What is this Airy Force?" inquired Regina.

"The loveliest waterfall. I thought, meeting you so near, you had been exploring."

"And I—who have never seen a waterfall!" cried Regina. "Let me out, Richards—I hope, Edith, you have strength left for this."

"We will all go," said the duchess; "I never like to pass the hunting lodge without paying it a visit."

Lord Ellesdon handed out Regina, and they set off across the fields to the beautiful ravine, where the slender shaft of water falls seventy feet into a rocky basin, shadowed with trees. Half-way down there is a narrow wooden bridge, upon which the party stood, admiring the diamond clearness of the pool beneath, the dazzling spray, the moist greenness of the moss, the vapoury freshness of the atmosphere, the ever-changing column falling so near.

“You will see nothing like this in Egypt,” said Regina, as Lord Ellesdon handed her across the plank, when they at length moved to descend the narrow path that led to the foot of the cascade.

“If I thought I should see any thing I had been used to see, I would not go there,” he replied.

“Take care of Miss Howard!” called the duchess, a little lower down; “I will be Miss Carleton’s cicerone.”

“It’s a bad path, always slippery—do you want to go down?” asked Lord Ellesdon.

“Very much,” said Regina; “I’m not afraid.”

“Give me your hand—don’t be in a hurry. I say, Miss Howard, I wish you were going with me.”

“Why, so I am,” answered Regina, thinking only of the waterfall, and carefully advancing her slender foot to a fragment of rock just beneath where she stood.

“I mean to Egypt,” said Lord Ellesdon, looking earnestly in her face.

“That’s nonsense!” she returned; and she felt that a more inconvenient place for a declaration

could not have been chosen, since, if she had rejected his support at that moment, she must have slipped into the pool, so that in one sense it was impossible to refuse his hand.

“My mother said you would not listen to me!” he exclaimed.

“She might say, with truth, that I could hardly hear you,” laughed Regina, pointing to the cascade, whose rushing sound almost drowned their voices.

“You don’t care to hear me,” he retorted.

“You seem to think that *Le sage entend à demi mot!*” said Regina, still descending.

“Will you allow me to call on you at Keswick?”

“Really, I don’t think it is quite proper for single women to receive visits from young noblemen.”

“I wonder how long you will remain a single woman?”

“Always!”

“Excuse me, but I cannot believe that assertion.”

“I dare say not—men never do.”

“I cannot believe any woman of sense and feel-

ing would make or keep a resolution to forego all the duties and blessings of her sex. It is very well while you are young; but, just be good enough to think over the old maids of your acquaintance. The best, useless and ridiculous—the worst, absolutely rabid with ill-nature.”

“St. Paul thought otherwise, but no doubt you know best,” said Regina meekly; but, while she spoke, a keen recollection of her old friend Winny made her blush and laugh.

“I wish you would be in earnest,” pleaded her companion.

“I am very much so,” she replied. “If you wish for plain speaking, allow me to say that I look on your censure as very illiberal, and barely polite, since it is only a question of a few years more or less, whether *I* am included in your category or not.”

“As if it were possible to imagine that you would adhere to such a resolution! It only remains to be proved whether I, or some more fortunate person, shall be able to persuade you to change your mind.”

“Look at Edith Carleton, hanging over the brink of the pool! Would she not make a good picture of Sabrina, ‘with her amber-dropping hair?’”

“I cannot fancy Sabrina in a gauze bonnet.”

“I might hint, quite incidentally, that the bonnet in question is composed of *paille lustrée*—but I was thinking of the face.”

“I wish you would not talk of bonnets.”

“No! your mind turns naturally on a different style of costume. You are hesitating between a turban and a felt hat—or, perhaps, you mean to shave your head and wear a fez, like Miss Martineau.”

“I hate the very name of Miss Martineau!”

“To be sure, it’s a crime to be single—I forgot that.”

“I could apply to her Thackeray’s description of another single lady, in his matchless *Vanity Fair*—‘a godless old woman without her wig!’”

“Well, I never argued that a single woman should be godless—rather the contrary; and I might suggest that, if you judge by that lady’s



last work, she is willing to accept not only one God, but any number you please."

"Now, Miss Howard, to come back to the case in point—shall I have the honour of waiting upon you when I return from Egypt?"

"If you are accompanied by a dark-eyed Lady Ellesdon—seventeenth daughter of Ibrahim Pacha."

"I do wish you would not laugh."

"You quite mistake my physiognomy—I say quite seriously, that I choose a single life! You don't, which I am very glad to hear; for I am sure it would vex the duke and duchess extremely if you were to adopt any such perverse conclusion."

"You will drive me to some perverse conclusion if you treat me in this way."

"Do you smoke, Lord Ellesdon?"

"Yes; why do you ask?"

"*Raison de plus* for the alliance which I have delicately suggested. Ibrahim Pacha is a great man, and has a great many daughters, and they *all* smoke; and, to tell you a secret which should be worth a great deal to you, English women

(though they pretend otherwise when they are on their promotion) detest tobacco most cordially."

"As if I should hesitate an instant to give up smoking if you gravely made it an objection."

"But I admire it very much in pictures and books of travels—I shall think of you trying to propitiate Mademoiselle Ibrahim with an amber mouthpiece and a pound of *short cut*."

"You would make a saint swear, Miss Howard!"

"I hope not!—Of course you know that you ask a Mahomedan after 'his house,' you are not so vulgar as to inquire after his 'daughters;' and I believe an alliance in that rank is rather expensive for the gentleman—but, to do you justice, you are not mercenary."

"You continue to fascinate one, even when you are most provoking," said Lord Ellesdon.

"What is the matter with you two?" asked the duchess as they joined her; "are you quarrelling?"

"Desperately!" said Regina.

"I could not quarrel with Miss Howard," remarked Lord Ellesdon.

“You must part friends,” said the duchess; “he goes away next week.”

“Ah! you will bear in mind my little suggestions about the pacha’s daughter?”

“I shall bear *you* in mind only too much, Miss Howard.”

“Adieu!” said the duchess; “I shall very soon find my way over to Keswick.”

“I think,” said Edith, after a long silence, “that Lord Ellesdon looked very disconsolate when he said good-by to you.”

“Really!” said Regina, laughing.

“You always laugh at those things,” remarked Edith.

“I laugh, in this case, because I am glad; it is a comfortable reflection to me that there are some people who are disconsolate, as you term it, for exactly ten minutes, if you are not sensible of the honour they intend you—and such a person is that very pleasant, well-behaved man, from whom we have just parted.”

“A good many people are in love with you,” sighed Edith.

“Not a good many, my dear; the list is a very small one. We will begin with Lord Ellesdon—if you can, by the aid of a very strong magnifier, suppose that the liking he feels deserves the name of love! Certainly it is not mercenary, for I have not now fortune enough to tempt a man in his position; but, you may depend on it, I shall hear no word more of the six or eight pretenders to Beyminstre, who used to annoy me. On my word, I ought to think more gratefully of Lord Ellesdon; for he stands alone! If I live to be old, I shall look back and say, I did once have one lover who paid attention to me, and not to Beyminstre!”

“I do not think he stands quite alone in his feelings,” said Edith, with some hesitation.

“My dear Edith! surely you cannot think that Lord Henry——?”

“No! not Lord Henry,” replied Edith—“though at times his manner to you has given me more pain than I can express; but though I was so deeply engrossed by my own folly at that time, yet I saw—I could not help suspecting——”

Regina felt her cheeks glow. Surely Edith was not foolish enough to imagine, as Alban had done, that Lord Oswestry had too warm a regard for her. She hardly liked to ask her to go on.

“One person,” Edith continued, “who watched you so incessantly, and listened to all you said, and looked so restless when others were paying you attention—though, somehow or other, he hardly ever spoke to you.”

“Why, who do you mean?” asked Regina, turning quickly to her.

“Sir Alban Willingham!”

“I thought so! He! Yes—he listened, and pryed, and wandered about me; not because he cared one straw what my lot in life was to be, but just from curiosity to see who was likely to possess his darling Beyminstre. That man’s infatuated idolatry for that place, should be a warning to all Christian people! I declare I felt in a bad dream whenever he was near me. Let us never mention the place or the man any more. I could thank Heaven, on my knees, that all that wretched time is past!”

Edith opened her blue eyes in astonishment at her friend's vehemence, but she very readily promised not to allude any more to the forbidden topic; and so, as people do when there is something they must not talk about, she sat thinking of Alban, and trying with all her might to find something else to say.

"Do you know, Edith, what I am thinking of?" asked Regina, after a pause.

"Of Bey—oh! I forgot!"

Regina laughed merrily. "No, not exactly—but I don't wonder you can't get it out of your head after my absurd tirade. Pray, dear Edith, don't feel there is a subject you must not approach, or we should never get on well together. I was wondering what we should find Mrs. Shirley like; for, after all, I was not able to meet her in town. She must be nice, or the duchess would not have recommended her."

"We shall soon see," replied Edith; "there, beneath us, lies the town of Keswick."

"And great Skiddaw behind. That must be one of our first excursions, Edith. Now our home



is on this side of Keswick, half-way up the hill. The name is Eglantine Villa. I don't like the name, but I could live in any sort of house for the sake of such a view."

A few more minutes, and the carriage drew up before a picturesque summer residence, with a veranda garlanded with roses and clematis, which opened in a velvet lawn that sloped down to the road. In the veranda stood an elderly lady, short and rather stout, with smooth grey hair, and a comely motherly face. She came to the carriage door with outstretched hands, partly in welcome, partly to help out the travellers.

"I have the pleasure of speaking to Mrs. Shirley?" inquired Regina.

"Yes, my dear! Dear me, what a young thing she is to be alone in the world! And Miss Carleton, poor love! But I'm very glad you are safe arrived: it is getting dark, and the dew is very heavy. This way, my dears—tea is ready, and a bit of fire lit; and when did you leave my kind friend the Duchess of Clareville?"

“We met her on the road, not very far from here,” said Regina.

“Well, to be sure—how very singular! My dear, is your tea sweet enough? And here’s a footstool for Miss Carleton. Does she cough at all, poor thing?”

“Not much, Mrs. Shirley; but we mean both to grow strong in this beautiful country. I think we shall be out all day while this bright weather lasts.”

“Only, my dear, I hope you will be prudent; don’t over-walk yourselves—this is a very hilly country.”

Regina thought so, too, as the mountain tops gloomed grey around them in the twilight.

“We can hire ponies, I dare say, Mrs. Shirley, for climbing the hills?”

“Plenty, my dear; but I don’t know whether they are quite steady. I should think a car would be better—a little more tongue? a bit of chicken? No! dear heart, you eat nothing after your journey.”

“I can do nothing but look at the view,” said Regina, going to the window. “This is the Der-

went water, but what silver streak is that I see yonder?"

"Oh! that's Bassenthwaite—beyond Cross-thwaite Church."

"Is that where Southey is buried?"

"Southey, my dear? I dare say he may be. He wrote some poetry, I think; it's a very pretty church."

"Decidedly," thought Regina, "she's a very nice old lady, but not literary. We could walk there, I think, Edith; it looks quite close."

"It's a good step off, my dear," said Mrs. Shirley; "that's your nearest church, on this side the town—you can see the tower."

"Yes, for Sundays," said Regina, smiling; "but that does not contain Southey's monument."

And now the moon is on the lake, and the tea is cleared away. Edith is resting on the sofa, and Regina gazes, with her soul in her eyes, at the glorious panorama that extends on every side. Mrs. Shirley's knitting-needles click cheerfully.

"By the way, Mrs. Shirley," said Regina, carelessly, "there can hardly be any letters for me yet?"

“Yes, my dear, there *are*—*two*!” said Mrs. Shirley, impressively; “but I thought I’d wait till you asked for candles—it was hardly light when you first came in.”

A blush came over her face, she trembled with anxiety. She had half expected that Alban would have called before she left Holmwood. The duchess thought so as well; but, no doubt, he felt a meeting would be awkward—he had preferred writing. Such an event as her resignation could hardly be passed over without some comment. As a gentleman (and she did not mean to deny him that qualification), he must say something. She could not wait; she must have her letters at once.

“If you would kindly order candles,” she said, trying to steady her voice, “I should like to read them now. I’m rather eager about letters.”

“Yes, my dear, to be sure,” said Mrs. Shirley; and she stuck her knitting-pins through her ball of lamb’s wool, and laid her work slowly down—then she rang for candles, and then with a cedar alumet she carefully lit a taper, and went into the

next room. Edith, roused by the light, sat up blinking her eyes.

“Here they are, my love!” said Mrs. Shirley.

Regina, standing at the table, tore open the first. It was a printed paper from “Everest, draper and hosier; woollen goods and fancy plaids of every description.” She flung it down, and seized the other, which was in a handsome envelope, carefully sealed.

“Mr. Tupman, butcher, George-street, respectfully solicits the *honour* of Miss Howard’s esteemed favours.”

“And are these all?” cried Regina, tearing the harmless note in half, and crushing the pieces in her hand.

“Yes, my dear, those two; and, as I thought they were something of that kind, I have not settled to deal any where, but just paid as I went, and ordered in a——”

“Dear Mrs. Shirley, excuse me!” broke in Regina, whose patience would hold out no longer; “we are both so tired, that we will go to bed at once.”

“And the butcher, my dear?”

“I leave all that to you,” she said, escaping from the room. “Not a word—not a line! Well, it is best—that way the past is easier forgotten!”



## CHAPTER IX.

FOR the next week Regina felt a complete *embarrass de richesses*—there were so many places she wished to see while the fine weather lasted; and this year the fine weather was particularly complaisant. The summer was a blaze of glory—with the exception of the occasional storms of rain and wind common to mountain districts. But the near neighbourhood of Keswick is so fraught with beauties, that the friends had not yet made up their minds to spend a whole day away from their favourite haunts. To row on the lake, morning and evening, to wander beside the lovely Greta, or among the wooded hills that rise straight from the shores of the Derwent water, had so engrossed them hitherto, that they were quite surprised to find so many days had slipped

away, and they had not yet ascended Skiddaw nor visited Buttermere, nor seen Borrowdale, nor even driven to the nearer Bassenthwaite.

“What shall we do first, Edith?” asked Regina one delightful morning, as they stood together on the lawn, watching the mist gradually clearing off from the mountain tops.

“They say it’s not clear enough for Skiddaw,” said Edith; “and I am half afraid of those black ponies, they look so spiteful.”

“I wonder what lies out between those mountains!” said Regina, pointing across the lake; “those grey and pink shadows tempt me strangely. Do you know, Dixon?”

“La, ma’am! there ain’t nothing—not yonder,” replied Dixon, who was never sparing of his negatives.

“Dixon believes in a vacuum,” laughed Regina, turning to Edith; “he also believes that those desperate-looking hills will scratch all the remaining varnish off his brougham.”

Dixon, who was sweeping the newly-mown grass off the lawn, admitted that he didn’t see

not no use in going to the first house in London to have a carriage built, and then to knock it to pieces over roads which he supposed had been made about the time of Noah's ark, "when nobody didn't know no better."

"So that we will take a car for the day, if you will bespeak one with a careful driver, Dixon," remarked Regina; "and find out, if you can, what part of the country it is called out there?"

Dixon's mind being relieved about his brougham (for he never, even in thought, admitted that it belonged to Regina), he had now no objection to confess that, from what he had heerd, if they went fur enough in that direction they would come upon Crummock water, and then Buttermere—"but, bless you! it would be a good day's work; it was a long twenty mile from here, and twenty mile was as good as forty, when you come to consider the awful hills."

"What makes you so merry, my dears?" asked Mrs. Shirley, as the two girls came in laughing through the glass doors to breakfast.

"We are going to explore the interior of this

unknown country, Mrs. Shirley," said Regina; "will you come with us to Buttermere?"

"No, thank you, my dear (with a very perceptible shiver); it's a bitter cold bleak place, is Buttermere! I'm sure the very sight of those dark steep mountains, rising straight out of the water's edge, is enough to make any one feel rheumatic; and I only hope, my dears, you have plenty of warm shawls."

"This lovely morning, Mrs. Shirley?"

"Ah! you never know, in these parts, what weather you will have for an hour together—and as to your luncheon, I am thinking——"

"Don't think, Mrs. Shirley! We will take whatever the inn affords when we put up at Buttermere. The driver must be fed, and we will have luncheon at the same time."

About the shawls, it must be allowed that the young ladies were a little obstinate—the morning was so bright and warm, that Regina thought she made a great concession in wearing a small cashmere, and Edith declared she was almost stifled beneath her thin barège scarf.

: Nothing could be more successful than the expedition to Buttermere. The wild lonely journey, the beautiful road along the Crummock water, and the frowning grandeur of the mountains that wall in the little gloomy lake of Buttermere, kept the two friends in a constant fever of delight. The day was so brilliant, that every lovely spot was seen to the greatest advantage. They wandered about until they were fairly exhausted, and then proceeded to the little inn, and modestly asked for something to eat.

The motherly hostess shewed them into a small room, and hastened to set before them what she evidently considered a delicate meal; namely, some very sour cheese, a jug of thin beer, and that extraordinary composition called oatcake—which tastes to southern palates like a mixture of sand and soap.

She had nothing else in the house, she mentioned: no eggs—no fish—no bread—yes, she had water! and seemed rather amazed that the ladies preferred it to the nectar in the beer jug.

“I am so sorry on your account, Edith,” said

Regina, when they were alone; "I wish we had brought something eatable with us."

"Oh! don't think of me—this lovely scenery has been my feast: besides, we shall eat the better dinner."

"But, look!" cried Regina suddenly; "how black the sky has become. I hope, after all, we are not going to have rain."

"The car is ready," said Edith, going to the window; "perhaps we had better start at once."

The weather certainly began to threaten—the dark mountains round the lake looked bleak and ominous.

"We shall have a storm, for certain," said the driver, as the ladies came out, and two or three great drops fell plashing down as he spoke.

"Could not we stay the night here?" inquired Regina, looking with anxiety at Edith's delicate form.

No; all the rooms were occupied—there was a whole family staying at the little inn; and two gentlemen had sent from Shap to secure the two last beds she had in the world.



“Don’t mind me,” whispered Edith; “a storm among the mountains will be well worth a drenching.”

“To me—not to you,” said Regina, taking her seat in the car; “and not even a cloak—not so much as a spare shawl!”

“Mrs. Shirley will be able to say, ‘I told you so!’” returned Edith, laughing.

“Here’s something to shelter ye!” cried the mistress, throwing an old horsecloth after them into the car; “’t driver can bring it back when a coom this way again.”

The landlady knew better than they did what was before them. They spread the cloth over their knees, rather reluctantly, for it was by no means redolent of Arabian perfumes, and began slowly to ascend the mountain.

The wind sang and whistled, then screamed among the rocks—the rain flashed and wreathed around them, or drove in slanting sheets steadily against the mountain side—rebounding like hail-drops from the black crags. The carman led his horse zigzag up the steep ascent, and at a sharp

angle of the road he stopped, and begged the ladies to get to the bottom of the car, for he was half afraid the wind would blow it over the mountain side. And there he stood, till the blast, yelling like a vexed multitude of demons, should subside a little.

The bottom of the car was three or four inches deep in water, which rendered it not altogether desirable as a seat; but they crouched down; Regina covering Edith with the old rug, very much to her discomfort. Her bonnet came off, she lost her comb, and the weight of the rug pulled down her long light hair. She looked more like Sabrina than ever.

The driver was perplexed and cross: the two girls stifled their laughter, that they might not make him more ill-tempered.

The thick rain, the shifting mist, the black mountain, the deep ravines, and the glimpses of Crummock water through the great ledges of rock—the air filled with a mighty tumult of sounds, unknown except in mountain districts, all raised Regina's spirits to the utmost.

“If you were but a little better clothed, Edith, I should call this very amusing,” she remarked. “Oh! what a howl! I thought we should have been blown across the ravine in good earnest then.”

“What’s the matter, my good fellow? cannot you make head against the storm?” asked a voice that seemed familiar to Regina.

She looked up, and saw Lord Henry and Sir Alban standing close to the horse’s head.

Edith, with a low cry, sank closer into the blanket.

“’T ladies be frightened, sir!” said the driver.

“I wish we could be of any service to the ladies,” he returned, coming forward and raising his dripping felt hat.

“I’m not frightened, Lord Henry,” said Regina, looking out of her retreat; “but I’m more uncomfortable than I ever was in my life, the water in here is a foot deep.” And she laughed, while he could not help joining her: then, turning to Sir Alban, he said something hastily, to which his friend seemed to make a negative reply, and re-

mained in the middle of the road leaning on his stick.

"Shall I open the door? perhaps it will run out," he suggested, turning the handle.

"No, but it won't! you step down into these carts like a well. Only beg the driver to go on; and, if the horse *could* run away to Keswick, we should be much obliged to it."

"I should really be glad to escort you, Miss Howard, if you would give us leave," said Lord Henry; "we might just as well walk on to Keswick as go to the other place—what's its name? Buttermere?—and it is hardly safe for two ladies to be out in such a storm."

"Many thanks!" laughed Regina. "I can inform you that Keswick is three times as far off as Buttermere; and, as the sunshine of your presence would be strictly allegorical, you would be no protection against our only danger—that of getting wet through."

"You are staying at Keswick, then?"

"Yes; that is, if we ever find ourselves there again; perhaps you would give the horse a poke

with your stick. Thank you very much. Good by!"

The horse scrambled off—the corner was turned—they were between two huge hills that almost shut out the obscured light, and they went on, fast or slow, as they best might. They did not speak to each other until they were going through the main street of Keswick. Regina was thinking of Alban: of his silent, distant manner—only raising his hat to her just as they were parting company: at last she broke silence—

"Edith!"

Edith lifted up her face, all stained with tears, from the bottom of the car. She was shivering like an aspen.

"Oh, that's enough! If you mean to forgive the man, and be friends again, after all—*do!* I don't! I am not so easily conciliated; for I suppose that is the reason why they have come prying into Cumberland. They could have got mountains enough in Scotland, if that were their object, and rain too, for that matter; though of course I am speaking of Lord Henry all this time—for the

other, I know what brings *him* ! He is come to look after his amiable widow, who has some property in the neighbourhood."

"You don't believe he is here on purpose, Regina?" said Edith.

"It is rather a strange coincidence if he is not," said Regina.

"I have no pleasure in seeing him," cried Edith ; "I never wish to find myself in his presence again. I am ashamed to think I ever cared for such a man. If he comes, Regina, will you deny him the house?"

"In earnest, Edith?"

"Yes—from my heart ! I feel humiliated that he made me such a dupe ; and I know better, now, what people ought to be."

The last words were hardly audible—the car by this time had stopped before the door, and Mrs. Shirley awaited them with much condolence, and plenty of hot tea and warm garments within.

Regina, wrapped in her shepherd's plaid, was walking up the main street of Keswick the next morning, when she encountered Lord Henry



and Sir Alban, just coming out of the principal inn.

“I am glad to see you alive, Miss Howard!” exclaimed Lord Henry, advancing towards her.

“I think I have a good idea now of being drowned,” she returned; “what a day it was!”

She bowed as slightly as possible, in answer to Sir Alban’s salutation. Lord Henry walked on by her side.

“I hope,” he said, hesitating—“that your friend is not the worse for——”

“Yes—she caught a severe cold, and I’m quite uneasy about her,” said Regina, quickly.

“Have you any medical adviser upon whom you can rely?” asked Lord Henry, looking very anxious.

“None!” she replied. “I have no idea who to send for; and, unless my friend gets better, I must write to Holmwood for my old friend, Mr. R——. And now,” she thought, “I hope I have made him uncomfortable!”

“You will allow me, I hope, to call and inquire how you both are to-morrow?”

“It will be very kind in you to take so much trouble—(for nothing),” she added, under her breath.

“And whither are you bound?” he asked.

“I am wandering about, in the hope of finding a shop where I may buy a comb—Miss Carleton lost hers yesterday.”

“You don’t mean to say that it was blown away?”

“It came out in the struggle with the wind and rain—I can hardly tell how. Will this do? No—I am sure they sell nothing in Keswick but lead pencils.”

“That is *my* object at present—we are going to the pencil manufactory.”

“Then I can direct you—that is your turning.”

“Have you been there?”

“Yes! and bought no end of pencils—and regretted that I could not buy that delicious odour of cedar which lingers in the building, and makes you fancy you are approaching the forest of Lebanon.”

She bowed with a slight, graceful inclination,

that took in both gentlemen, and pursued her way.

She was just leaving the shop, where she had at last succeeded in her purchase, when a pretty low carriage, drawn by two ponies, came slowly up the hill, driven by a groom, beside whom sat an upright lady, dressed in handsome new deep mourning. It was Winny Hopper.

“Regina!” exclaimed that lady; “is it really you? Staying here—and alone? No, with Miss Carleton? Edith quite well? Very poorly—I don’t wonder at that! Lady Oswestry quite well? And dear little Clara and Violet?”

“I wish Lady Violet could hear you!” thought Regina, while she civilly answered Miss Hopper’s inquiries.

“Not heard of my loss? poor dear mama—not seen it in the papers? Taking a little tour to divert my mind after the sad event. But we must all submit to a higher Power. I am staying at the Queen’s Head—and you?”

“I have taken a house at the side of the hill, beyond the town, where I hope to have the pleasure

of seeing you when Miss Carleton is a little better," said Regina.

"You are very good! It is rather embarrassing for a young lady to be staying alone at an inn; but what can I do? I am the last of our race now!"

"Oh!" thought Regina, "I wish Lord Henry could hear you."

"I might, perhaps, be useful in nursing dear Edith," said Winny; "although she has been weak and sinful, we should not be too severe——"

"Thank you, Miss Hopper—we have a most kind and excellent nurse in Mrs. Shirley, the lady who resides with me; and allow me to hint, that if Miss Carleton had been sinful, in your sense of the word, she would not be my friend and associate—although I would have done, I hope, every thing in my power to reclaim her."

"Well! we will hope," said Winny, reluctantly; "by the by, have you seen any thing of Lord Henry lately?"

"I parted from him about five minutes ago," said Regina indifferently. "He was walking with his friend, Mr. Willingham."

“Naughty Lord Henry! he told me he was going to the Lakes!” cried Winny, her face puckered with delight.

“Told *her*—how very odd!” thought Regina.

“He writes such lively, naughty letters,” added Winny.

“Writes to *her*!” thought Regina, still more puzzled.

“And that was one inducement to me to come here,” said Winny. “It is a charming country, and he could drive me about, you know. Nice little carriage, isn’t it? Did he go this way? I shall pay you a visit very soon.”

And the carriage whirled away.

“I wonder what is the *mot de l’enigme*,” said Regina; “are they engaged—those two? or has she been lending him money? I remember, when they found out at Piermont that she had lent money to Mrs. Chillingworth, how they all laughed. Certainly, women cannot think too lowly of themselves in every way. I believe, in nine cases out of ten, when they fancy they are occupying a man’s thoughts, it is a most complete mistake on their

part. Now, after all that has happened, it would not seem such a very extravagant or conceited idea, in Edith or me, to suppose that these two gentlemen had found their way into Cumberland on our account—Edith particularly. Not at all! Alban comes on business, and very likely may end by marrying this handsome widow, and taking her out with him in the autumn; and Lord Henry gives Miss Hopper a rendezvous either to laugh at her (of which he is very capable), or else he finds that she has more money than I imagined, and really means to make her an offer. I hope not, though! Little as he is worth, I confess I should not like to see Winny Hopper—Lady Henry Montresor!”

“Oh, Mrs. Shirley! how is Edith?”

Miss Carleton was no better; and when the two gentlemen called, later in the day, the answer was that Miss Howard was in attendance on her friend, and could see no visitors.



## CHAPTER X.

THERE is a walk well known to tourists along the side of the Derwent lake, which runs parallel with the road for some time, and then extends into the water, and terminates suddenly. Thickets of trees meet overhead, and the little promontory at the end is completely overarched; a seat is placed there, and the lapping of the tiny waves against the stones and roots that hang into the lake, is the only sound that mingles with the song of birds, and the stir of the branches.

Regina had been for several days in close attendance upon Edith Carleton, who was suffering from a severe inflammatory cold; and Mrs. Shirley at last persuaded her to take advantage of the fresh summer morning, and spend an hour or two in her favourite retreat. She was in very

dejected spirits. The doctor, whom they had been obliged to call in, thought very unfavourably of Miss Carleton. He could only account for the state of weakness to which she was reduced, by supposing that there had been some great strain upon her powers, either of body or mind. He spoke very doubtfully of her chances of ultimate recovery. Regina, who had a real affection for Edith, was extremely indignant with Lord Henry. She told Mrs. Shirley she should always look on him as a murderer—much to that lady's horror. In this frame of mind she was not very much disposed to enjoy his society; but as she passed the landing-place, where the flat-boats are drawn up, each by its plank, she paused a moment to gaze on the ever-changing shadows upon the hills, and at the same time Lord Henry, who was standing with a waterman in one of the boats, looking over some fishing-tackle, sprang out on the shore and came to meet her.

“I thought you had left Keswick,” she remarked civilly; for when she was very angry, up to a certain point, she was always civil.

“Willingham has gone for a few days, on business, to Durham,” he replied; “and, as I am all alone, I came down here to see the floating island.”

“Oh! has that appeared again?”

“Yes—won’t you row out to it?”

“I think not; I have very little curiosity.”

“You are alone,” he remarked, with some anxiety.

“Yes, at this early hour—but, indeed, at all times one may walk about here as if in one’s own grounds.”

She knew this was not the answer he wanted; but it must be owned she rather liked to torment.

“What a beautiful spot this is for summer!” said Lord Henry, after a moment’s pause.

“Yes! but do you know I am quite looking forward to winter—these mountains, all snow-covered, and the lake frozen across—I shall fancy myself in Norway.”

“You stay here all the winter?”

“I think so, if it is not too cold for my friends.”

“I never see your friends, Miss Howard.”

“Mrs. Shirley has come to that time of life, when she likes best to sit still at home all day—my other friend, as you are aware from your kind inquiries at my house, is too ill at present to leave her room.”

Lord Henry looked very melancholy.

“But, though you have not seen *my* friends,” continued Regina, “I have been more fortunate with respect to yours—I know Miss Hopper is at Keswick.”

“Foolish old woman! I hope you don’t suppose she is here on my account.”

“I think your society will very much add to the pleasure of her tour. Did you not row her out on the lake yesterday?”

“What—you saw us?”

“No—I only conjectured.”

“And I assure you, Miss Howard, I was very uncomfortable all the time. I thought we were infringing the proprieties.”

“Certainly that was a heart-rending thought to you—but you are going out fishing?”

“Yes—there is said to be a particular kind of

trout to be found in the lake. If I am successful, I hope you will allow me to send you some."

"Thank you very much."

She had made four or five attempts to proceed, but Lord Henry was not to be shaken off. He now walked on by her side.

"Let me carry your book," he said presently.

"What, this little mite?" said Regina. "Thank you! I won't trouble you. I like to hold a book in my hand that I love, even when I am not reading it."

"When a troublesome fellow prevents your reading, you would say. I know I am troublesome; but I trust a great deal to your good nature—I want to talk to you."

"You are not troublesome! You interrupt my thoughts as well as this book would have done; but that," said she laughing, "you can't understand."

"You think I have no feelings."

"Men can't understand—I did not mean you in particular. Men drink or smoke when they wish to get rid of their thoughts; and we read poetry, or walk till we are exhausted."

"You once gave me some good advice, Miss Howard, which has not been quite thrown away upon me."

"Could you let me have the date? because such a phenomenon deserves to be recorded. And, though I have no near relations to bequeath it to, society in general would feel an interest in such a remarkable fact."

"Though you laugh, Miss Howard, you are as far as I am from feeling gay."

"I believe so. I have very seldom much inclination to laugh."

"It is about Miss Carleton that I wished to consult you—I have done her a great injury; and yet, as you once told me, I loved her better than any other woman—more than I then believed."

"Well!" said Regina drily.

"There is but one atonement I can offer her for my conduct——"

"You would offer her your hand?"

"I would."

"And you call that an atonement!" cried Regina,



flushing with indignation; “you think that would cancel the past! And while she has a roof to shelter her, and a friend to stand between her and the world, do you think she would stoop to *you*, when you come with your tardy reparation, and talk of love and marriage almost on the threshold of her grave?”

“I hoped you would have been more kindly disposed to me,” he began.

“Because I can speak the language of the world, and, on the surface, can act courteously to you when we meet in a careless way, and say ‘good-morning!’ Did you ever see any thing in *me* that made you think I was like the rest within?—did I ever act or feel in any of the great pauses of life like *other people*? I thank Heaven, no!”

“Be merciful, Miss Howard—make allowances——”

“Have I failed in mercy to *her* when the world looked coldly on her? Did I lack allowance for her honest blindness when she fell into your snares? Oh, Lord Henry! if we are to talk smoothly, let us avoid that topic; let us speak of the weather, or

the scenery, and not of the poor girl you have cheated of her life!"

Her companion turned very pale—she stopped short, half vexed at her own vehemence.

"What do you mean about her life?" he asked after a short pause, during which he seemed to nerve himself to ask, and to hear patiently.

"I mean that her health is quite broken—that she has not the courage left to go on living—not for love of you, do not imagine that—but from sheer pain! A person may bear the torture very well, and die of it afterwards—don't you think so? And you don't know, quite, what she has had to bear since she last had the happiness of being in your society."

"And yet you think of wintering in this desolate place?"

"Because she is not consumptive—it was only the other day the doctor said we could not do better than remain in this bracing air: she has not strength, that is all. You may have heard of merchants, suddenly beggared, dying in a week, a few days—dying in perfect health; and you cannot

understand that a woman, beggared a hundred-fold—beggared in every hope, in fortune, fame, love, respect—all! you cannot conceive that she, too, should lie down and die, only because she has not the heart to live! I must think your imagination very defective.”

He kept his face turned towards the lake, looking out through the trees, trying to conceal his emotion. Regina gave him credit, for once, for feelings, because he did not parade them.

“I have been very passionate, and I ought to be sorry,” she said at length; “but it was your fault. You would not let me alone—I can be smooth enough you know at other times.”

“Don’t attempt to defend yourself,” he said quickly; “every word you utter is true, alas! but, Miss Howard, I will make amends for all.”

“In what way? your family will never receive her.”

“They may do as they please. I suppose you look on yourself as her guardian,” he said, with a smile. “I am acting *selon les règles* in applying to you for permission to address Miss Carleton.”

"Then, as her guardian, I say that she is not at present in a state of health to receive your proposals," said Regina; but she looked pleased.

"Let me only see her! you can't deny me that!" exclaimed Lord Henry eagerly.

"She is not well enough, indeed."

"But you will tell her—you must be aware that her illness is only on the mind."

"I think it should be my business to keep her mind quiet," she replied demurely.

"Oh, Miss Howard! you will stand my friend—I am sure you will! I will make her very happy! We will live abroad—I think in Switzerland: it is very cheap at Lausanne."

"But will your income enable you to marry?" asked Regina, gravely.

"Yes, with such an angel! I am not afraid of poverty; and in that country a few hundreds go so far—you would not believe that I have not more than a miserable five hundred a year."

"And debts!" added Regina.

"And debts!" he admitted with a laugh; "but

I dare say Oswestry will pay my debts—he will not be sorry to be rid of me so easily.”

“And you think Edith will consent to go to Switzerland?”

“Yes, I think so, if you offer no opposition—and you will not. After all, you must be aware that it is better she should marry—you cannot stop people’s tongues, and almost every body has such a keen pleasure in believing the worst. And even *you* cannot say that Miss Carleton did not care for me, once.”

“I can say, with a safe conscience, that she would not, had she been a little wiser! I do not feel justified in rejecting your proposal altogether; but I wish I felt sure that Edith was as little disposed to forgive you as I am.”

“Ah, Miss Howard! you are not so implacable as you seem. If it were your own case, I know you would be quite eager to forgive.”

“You think so!” she replied—“But you always understood my character so well!”

“I always *admired* it, Miss Howard, at any rate.”

“Well! to change the subject—and always in the character of Miss Carleton’s guardian, you understand—I think I may object to the very marked attentions you are in the habit of paying to a certain lady——”

“Miss Hopper, of course!” he said, laughing heartily. “Yes, I think if I never give her stronger cause of jealousy than that! Why, won’t you let me have a little fun with Winny Hopper? it is too severe, Miss Howard—now, when I have nothing else to do.”

“I wish you would let her alone for another reason,” said Regina; “she may have feelings, though she is very ridiculous; she may like you—there is no accounting for tastes; or she may wish to raise herself by marriage—and you give her ample reason to think you are attached to her. Now, I can’t see that she deserves to be baffled and cheated by *you*—she has never done *you* any harm.”

“Harm! Heaven bless her! no—she has done, or tried to do, me no end of good, on the contrary. But you see, Miss Howard, out of consideration for *her*, I cannot break off our acquaintance just



at present. She is converting me ; and she does so enjoy it ! I have a sweet hymn now in my pocket—oh no ! I made it up into papelitos ; but she gave it me yesterday, and I promised her to get it by heart if she would only sing it to me, and, after coaxing her for half an hour, she did, like a sucking pig ! Ah ! you cannot help laughing at the thought of Winny's vocal powers."

"If I laugh—because I know she has no voice at all ; only a little squeak, as you say, like a sucking pig—that is no reason why you should make her conspicuous, by rowing her on the lake, as you did yesterday."

"That was, I assure you, merely a scientific excursion. She wished to see the floating island, and she told me all about the gas, and then she gave me a lesson on botany, and we had to go to the head of the lake to find a damp sort of plant, which she assured me was a very fine specimen. She thinks, with some truth, that my education has been rather neglected ; although she owns that I draw better than she does."

"And have you been making her any sketches?"

"I just gave her a scrap or two I made at Borrowdale—little scrawls, that I should have thrown away if she had not begged them."

"You correspond, I know; for she told me so."

"One or two foolish letters that I wrote for fun; and partly to learn if she knew any thing of Edith."

"It would serve you right, and I should not be astonished, if she were to bring an action against you for breach of promise."

"Oh! I know she could not do that. Are you going home?"

"Yes—I am not comfortable about Edith."

"You will allow me to go back with you?"

"But your fishing?"

"Unless you are impatient for your trout, I had rather put it off."

"I will wait for that—and I dare say you would not have caught any."

"You will see to-morrow—perhaps in a day or two *she* may be well enough to go out with me."

"I wish I could think so—I don't know how it

is," said Regina, stopping short, "but I feel very uneasy."

"Was she worse this morning?"

"I don't know—they said not—only so very weak."

"I cannot help hoping that I—that, in fact—I know, Miss Howard, you will think me very conceited."

"Not more so than usual. Oh! I wish I could jest," and she stopped again.

"Take my arm, and don't hurry. You are nervous to-day, that is all."

"I can walk faster than that—I own I am anxious to be at home—something is happening."

"Why, Miss Howard, I thought you a strong-minded young lady! Your kindness has led you to do too much for your patient—you have shut yourself up till you are ready to start at your own shadow."

"There! do you see?"

"What? good Heaven—how catching this fear is!"

“There’s Dixon running to meet us—there, through the trees!”

“Some visiter, perhaps, who makes a point of seeing you.”

“Oh! no, no!—I have not so many friends—unless indeed the duchess——”

“The most likely person in the world; and, coming from a distance, she would be sure to wait if she found you out, and have you sent for.”

“Well, Dixon!” cried Regina, toiling on to meet him.

“Oh! if you please, ma’am, Mrs. Shirley sent me—Miss Carleton is taken very badly——”

“What did I tell you?” asked Regina. “Good by!”

“I go with you—I have almost a right!” he exclaimed, offering his arm again.

“It was soon after you left the house, ma’am, the doctor came,” pursued Dixon; “and he thought she was very bad. Mrs. Shirley, she thought (she said) Miss Carleton was having a nice sleep.”

“So did I,” murmured Regina.

“And Mrs. Shirley, she thought I had better come after you, ma’am,” said Dixon—“but she did not know which way you was gone, and I have been all along the banks of the Greta, and then I come on here. You will soon be at home now, ma’am,” he added, compassionating her breathless attempts to hasten forward.

A few minutes more, and they reached the garden gate.

The maids were closing the shutters in the front of the house.

“You are too late!” whispered Regina, turning her pallid face to Lord Henry.

He could not answer.

Mrs. Shirley came weeping to the door, and took Regina in her arms.

“My dear! it was very quiet, very peaceful,” she sobbed; “we did not quite know when all was over—but it’s a grievous thing to see such a young creature die!”

## CHAPTER XI.

LORD HENRY insisted on following Edith to the grave; and Regina was not sorry to allow him this privilege, although it placed him, of necessity, on a more intimate footing with herself than she would have otherwise allowed.

He had almost forced his way in daily after the sad event, to inquire after Regina, and to bemoan his own unhappy loss; and he seldom favoured her with less than two hours of his company per diem, talking about himself, crying at intervals, exhibiting a lock of Edith's hair set in a locket, and going into despairing attitudes, so as to fatigue Regina past all endurance; while he confirmed Mrs. Shirley in the belief that he was a dear young man, with remarkably sweet feelings, and that he stood in perpetual need of the glasses of sherry and large



smelling-bottles, filled with salts, with which she advanced to him whenever he struck his forehead or had recourse to his pocket-handkerchief.

But the perseverance with which Winny besieged the house, during Lord Henry's visits, knew no bounds. She would hang over the garden gate for half an hour at a time, sending shrill messages to Regina, begging to be admitted to mingle her tears with Miss Howard—she insisted that she, too, had been recently a mourner—she declared that she always had loved that interesting Miss Carleton—and she *did* think it hard, that, as Regina admitted *one* sympathising friend, she should be excluded.

Lord Henry, whose feelings were very elastic, suggested one morning that snails and other creeping things were sometimes dislodged from garden walls by means of a water engine; but Regina, not being in a laughing mood, thought it better to go out to Miss Hopper, and explained to her that she herself was unfit for society, even of a sympathising kind; and that the reason why she admitted Lord Henry was, that, under the circumstances, he had almost a right to be received.

As Miss Hopper could not imagine what circumstances she alluded to, Regina informed her that Lord Henry had made Miss Carleton an offer of marriage very shortly before her death; and that it was natural he should have much to say, and to arrange, respecting the last duties he desired to pay to his affianced wife.

“No!” Winny declared—“there was some mistake. Lord Henry never, *never* loved—never, *never* sought—Miss Carleton as his bride!”

Régina said she would not contest the point: her own mind was satisfied, and she could only apologize for not inviting Miss Hopper in, and politely wish her good-morning.

But when the house was again thrown open, and Regina went back to all her daily habits, Lord Henry still found some excuse for continuing his visits. Miss Howard had recommended him some books of a graver character than he had been accustomed to read, at a time when he had lamented that he was unable to shake off the depression of his spirits—and he was always walking up to return them, or to discuss their merits.

Regina said to him one morning—"Now, I think, Lord Henry, you will do very well—you have read the four books that I recommended, and I don't really feel able to direct your studies any longer—you must apply to a better scholar for advice."

"And where am I to go for consolation?" he asked in a tone that made Mrs. Shirley look round for her smelling-bottle.

"No man wants that," said Regina; "you must leave that complaint to women, who are expected to suffer in silence, or not to feel at all. You can travel to the world's end, or the land's end, at an hour's notice."

"I have a great mind to go out with Willingham," he exclaimed.

"Ay, do! your friend seems to have forsaken you just at present—you had better set off after him, wherever he may be gone."

"He is near Durham, negotiating the sale of some small property for a young widow (a very pretty woman) who seems to be thrown upon his hands."

"Of course she is a very pretty woman!" said

Regina; "if she were not, gentlemen would hardly interest themselves to save her trouble. But I remember Lady Oswestry laughing at him about this very Mrs. Ruthven, long ago."

"I assure you, Miss Howard," said Lord Henry earnestly, "he has not the least idea of such a thing."

"He might do worse, I should think," was her reply, as she crossed to the piano.

Lord Henry implored her to sing Adelaïda, which he fancied to be a picture of his own feelings; and Mrs. Shirley sat, quite overcome with pity at the agitation he expressed in his manner as the song proceeded.

Regina looked at him with some contempt. "This is the 'luxury of woe!'" she thought. "A person who can put his feelings to music cannot be in a very bad way; and, if he felt a particle of real grief, he would not turn up his eyes, either—he would not find *that* do him any good. Oh! you are very welcome, Lord Henry; I am so glad you think it pretty. Oh! my singing—I'm so pleased that you like it."

And she thought, with a smile, of her singing at Piermont, when Lord Henry had rather made a display of his indifference.

“Now we are going to say good-by, are we not?” she resumed, after a few minutes’ silence. “I have no brothers, or uncles, to account for your visits; and therefore, unless under very peculiar circumstances, I don’t receive visiters of your sex. I wish you a very pleasant voyage, should you accompany your friend.”

“Oh, Miss Howard!” he said, detaining her hand, “can you be so cruel as to exile me, when all the happiness I have left is in your society? You are the only person who was kind to *her*—who valued *her* as she deserved!”

“Yes! but, by your own admission, people in this world are very apt to talk, and I don’t really know who would value *me* in such a case. There, Mrs. Shirley is making ready her pouncet-box :

‘Nay, pray you seek no colour for your going,  
But bid farewell, and go!’

like Mark Antony,” she added, laughing, as the door closed upon him. “Now, my dear Mrs.

Shirley, don't pity him—pity *me*, who have had ten days of this tinsel sentiment to endure, and who really have behaved like a heroine all the time!”

But Mrs. Shirley could not cordially echo this opinion; she was quite won by Lord Henry's good looks and fluent expressions. Many times, during the day, she would allude to him with real sympathy. “Poor young man!” she cried, “I wonder what he is about now. Yesterday, he drank tea here—I wonder what he would give to be sitting there at this very moment! Don't you think, my dear, the cream is rather thinner than usual?”

“Dear me, yes, Mrs. Shirley— I must speak about it.”

“I wonder whether he will get a copy, as you advised him, of the Pilgrim's Progress?”

“If he can meet with one cheap,” said Regina, slanting the cream jug to investigate the contents.

“Don't you consider him a very promising young man, my dear?”

“Much more given to promise than to perform, I believe, Mrs. Shirley.”



"I think I never saw any man so handsome," pursued the old lady.

"So they say—I don't see it," answered Regina.

"I wonder what style you admire, my dear?" asked Mrs. Shirley, thinking it rather strange that the beautiful girl opposite her seemed to have no romance of her own, though she had taken so warm an interest in that of other people.

She laughed a little and said, Jeremy Taylor's was the style she preferred.

The next morning, Mrs. Shirley espied Lord Henry going down to the lake, and began again to pity and lament over him. "Nobody to take an interest in him, poor young man! nobody to direct him! Of course, it was very right in Miss Howard to put a check upon his visits; but still, it was sad to think of any one in affliction without a friend to give him a helping word."

"Oh! don't distress yourself, Mrs. Shirley," said Regina; "there's a worthy soul, close behind him, who will be too happy to bestow upon him all the friendship and affection of which he stands in need."

“That Miss Hopper, my love? I can’t tell—I don’t wish to be uncharitable, but she does not *look* a very desirable companion.”

“I really should not wonder if he were to rush in here, just to beg for shelter,” laughed Regina; “and, if he did, I could hardly deny it to a fellow-creature under persecution.”

She sat down to her work: Mrs. Shirley went about her household concerns. Presently, a ring at the gate convinced her that her prediction was accomplished.

“It is a scandalous thing she won’t let the poor man alone!” she thought. “It makes one quite ashamed of one’s sex to see a woman, at her time of life, so very *affectionate*. Is there any age, I wonder, at which ladies are secure from the tender passion? By the way, I think I have a copy of Horne on the Psalms here—I’ll recommend that to Lord Henry. It will take him a week, I should think, to get through.”

She turned to greet Lord Henry as the door opened, and found herself face to face with Alban Willingham.

She had not risen, and she felt it was well; for the room swam round with her—she leaned her head back on her chair, and tried to see and hear clearly. As for speaking, that was not easy at the moment. He came up to her chair, and gazed down at her—except that he was very pale, he betrayed no particular emotion; and his voice was colder than ever when he began.

“Miss Howard, I must ask you to pardon this intrusion.”

She made a sign to invite him to be seated, and tried to form the words, but they would not come.

“I could not take this liberty,” he continued; “but that, as I am on the point of sailing for India, you are assured against it’s ever being repeated.”

“Won’t you be seated?” she asked, under the pressure of a sudden grasp of the heart that flushed her cheeks with pain.

He drew a chair beside her, and sat down.

“I have been several weeks in this country,” he said, “bent upon speaking to you a few parting words, and yet unable till to-day, by a mere chance, to come into your presence.”

"I am glad to see you," she replied, turning her face towards him, now pale as death.

Then, remembering that she had been denied to visitors during poor Edith's illness, she added—"You have probably heard that I have lost a friend lately, and that, during her last attack, I was too much engrossed to see any one."

"I know it," he said gravely; "and indeed you are looking very ill."

She wished he would not speak in that kind tone, for she felt the colour rush over her pale face again, and there was a pause for a minute, as she did not feel able to reply.

"And now that I am here," he continued, in a hurried tone, "words fail me altogether. I wished to let you know that I rendered justice to your character and motives—that, while others praise your generosity and greatness of heart, I am silent, not because my homage does not surpass theirs, but because all expression is too weak, and I leave undone the attempt to render my feelings into language."

She listened with parted lips. This was not

exactly what she wished, half hoped, to hear. There was a great deal of justice, and no love, in this tribute to her honest intentions. She felt angry with herself at having fancied that his old feelings were not quite worn out; and, when people are angry with themselves, they are a little apt to be rather hard upon their neighbours.

She made no reply, and let him go on.

“Lord Oswestry, who thinks he knows you better than I do, recommended me to see you before I left; to assure you, if I could, of what I felt—above all, that I do not regret the loss of this inheritance, which you——Regina—it was a great revenge to give it back to me!”

“You feel, then, I had something to revenge?” said Regina.

“Yes—you may pity me for that: I have begun to think I need your pardon—to feel that the rejection ought to have come from you. I was too proud to bear it, and so forestalled it, and drew back. I see now that I acted dishonourably—I would lose another Beyminstre to undo the rash decision of a single day.”

She roused herself and sat upright, and flashed her eyes upon him. She seemed endowed with tenfold beauty in her scorn.

“And so, when you bid me farewell that day upon the heath, I fancied you cared for *me*!” she exclaimed; “and so, when you intrusted your dying mother to my keeping, you gave over her last hours to one whose heart you did not read. Did you love *her*? did you love any one? Is there no living being you can trust? Is not your heart large enough to believe that there are some people who do not put wealth *first* in their daily prayers? So, then, you were to have given *me* Beyminstre—to have conferred your riches as the best gift you had to bestow upon *me*; and when, by the strange accident of fate, the estate was in *my* hands, you shrank from me as if I had been a leper. Do you think, if I had given you every coin I possessed, I should have weighed it all against one earnest feeling of my heart? You never loved me! I learned that with the first pang that wrung my soul upon your insolent silent rejection of my love and faith, and all my anguish and abasement was,



that I could not say as much of you at first—I have learned to say it since—I have had time!” And breathless, red and pale by turns, the fire in her eyes flashing and dying out, she fell back in her cushioned chair like a Pythoness who had “said her say.”

“Do not let our last parting be in this spirit,” said Alban after a troubled pause, for such passionate emotion is catching; “I have wronged you very deeply, and wronged myself incalculably more. I came here to entreat your pardon—you are sacred to me, if it were only for your tenderness to my mother—and you have broken down my pride to the dust. Be at peace with me now—bid me farewell kindly.”

“Well—good by!” she said, and held out both her hands. She felt the mist stealing over her eyes—the deadly faintness that precedes a swoon.

They both stood up.

“One word yet,” he said.

She was past tears, that she felt to be one comfort. She had some idea of trying to get to the window, but every thing was indistinct.

“You have my mother’s picture, have you not?”

“Yes! would you like to take it with you?”

“No!” he replied quickly.

“Nothing from *me!*” she whispered.

“I merely wished to see it once before I go, that I might take leave of all that has been dear to me together.”

“Has been dear!” she thought; “what have I ever done to forfeit his regard?” And she felt strong again, and walked firmly to the table on which stood the carved oak cabinet containing the miniature, and opened the folding-doors of the case. He gave one glance at the face, took her hand again, and was gone before she could speak, before she could think.

She sat down quietly on the sofa, and tried to go over what had passed, what she had said, what he had replied. She tried to account for the feeling of misery which almost stifled her. She had known all before, that every thing between them was over. That poor Sir Herbert’s will was the cause of it, if his change could be ascribed to any

thing so slight. She knew, too, that he was soon going to India; nothing fresh had happened—why was she so wretched? Had she done any thing wrong? She had been angry, but under such strong provocation as would have roused any woman, any worm.

He had come, it is true, to see her, but with what intentions? Simply to take leave, to imply and to say, that he never wanted to see or hear of her again—to pay her a compliment, not wholly undeserved, on her having resigned to him his horrible idol of a Beyminstre—and then to be gone! Not to seek to learn, by any hint or question, whether he might regain his place in her affection. That he no longer wished. Well! she could be as wise—as indifferent—she could be as careless as himself. No matter what became of him now—let him go to India to-morrow, if he pleased!

Looking up, she saw the window streaming with one of those sudden showers common to the district, and the thought suddenly touching her of Alban hastening forth from her house in that

weather, a feeling she could not control forced the tears from her eyes in a stormy burst of weeping, that made her glow with shame.

She was roused by the sudden embrace of two little arms, and, looking up, she found herself imprisoned by her little friend, Lord Exmoor.

“Oh, darling! is it you?—how glad I am!” she cried, kissing him; “and how came you here?”

“Papa and mama were to pass through Keswick,” said the child, “and I would come, too—I longed so much to see you again; and they are at the hotel, and told me to say they would come and take coffee with you, if you pleased.”

“I shall be delighted; but you need not go back—that is your servant, I think—I will send a line; and I don’t know when I shall let you go again, now I have you,” said Regina, holding him close to her with one arm, while she scribbled her note.

“And papa and mama are going on to see the

duchess, I suppose; and my little Exmoor will stay with me while they pay their visit. What a pretty dress he has on!"

"I wish they would never come back, but leave me here always," said the child, laying his head against her cheek; "but, Regina, who has made you cry?"

The best of women will tell stories on certain occasions—Regina did not form the exception to this rule; she answered, without hesitation, "No one, dear: only sometimes I cannot help thinking of sad things that have happened, and then, like a simpleton, you see how I behave."

"I was very sorry about Miss Carleton," said the little boy; "we have another governess now—such an ugly one! Her mouth is all on one side!"

Regina smiled at Lady Oswestry fulfilling her threat so literally. "But you will be kind, and not troublesome to her, though you don't think her pretty," she said.

"Yes! I behave pretty well to her—but Clara does not. She draws pictures of her all over her

slate, and she whistles while Miss Smith reads the History of England—Clara can whistle just like a boy. When are you coming to Piermont?”

“I told Lady Oswestry I should be glad to come when she is quite alone.”

“I hope that will be soon. Is cousin Henry hanging about here?”

Regina felt sure the phrase “hanging about,” was not his own. It would not be very pleasant if people were to couple her name with that of Lord Henry.

“Yes, your cousin has been here several weeks—I have often seen him. Perhaps you did not know he wished to marry Miss Carleton?”

“I knew some things—when we were in the study, and he used to come in and ask for writing-paper; but Barker said he only meant to make a fool of her.”

“Well, Barker made a mistake,” said Regina, smiling; “but now I will shew you the little room you shall have up-stairs—there, do you think it pretty? Look out on the mountains—you can see the lake between the trees—we will row there to-



morrow, and you shall fish—and we will ride up Skiddaw together.”

“Oh, Regina! and not with cousin Henry?”

“Oh, no! we don’t want cousin Henry—you shall be my cavalier.”

“How we shall enjoy ourselves! and not cousin Alban?”

“Certainly not—whoever thought of cousin Alban? Now, I am going to shew you a very nice old lady, who will be very kind to you while you are here. This is her own sitting-room. Mrs. Shirley, I have brought my little friend, Exmoor, to make friends with you, and he wants some dinner very much.”

“Pretty dear! he shall have some cold chicken and some apricot tart directly—I dare say he is famished after his journey.”

And the kind old lady bustled down-stairs to hasten the early tea, which was to include the little boy’s dinner. The child was so delighted with every thing—from the little chintz bedroom down to the apricot tart—that his spirits rose almost wildly. Regina, anxious that no traces of

her late emotion should appear, excited him more, in the hope of becoming excited herself; and, when Lord and Lady Oswestry walked up to the villa in the evening, she was dancing across the lawn with Lord Exmoor, teaching him the step of the Cellarius Waltz.

## CHAPTER XII

SHE looked more brilliant than ever as she came down to open the gate; her rich hair loosened, and the colour deepened on her cheek.

Lord Exmoor would have the first word.

“Mama!” he exclaimed, “I am to stay with Regina—I’m not going on with you to Ellesdon castle; and I have a little room, all to belong to me, and a pony is coming for me to ride.”

“Upon my word!” laughed Lady Oswestry, “I was well aware that you had gentlemen visitors already; and now you are going to improve upon that, and take one into your house altogether. But I’ll send up his things if you really wish for the brat!”

“Of course, you know I do,” said Regina, try

ing not to blush under the insinuation contained in Lady Oswestry's speech.

As they were going into the house, Lord Oswestry said to her in a low voice, "Miss Howard, what have you done with my cousin?"

"I!—nothing!" she returned, more embarrassed than angry.

"He came here—did he not?—to day——."

"Yes—to take leave before his voyage. We had been acquainted, I think I told you. He made a civil speech, too, about the estate. And I own that I spoke my mind to him—it's a relief, sometimes—and then he went away. That's all!" she replied; giving out these fragments one by one, in answer to his look, which seemed still inquiring.

"I had hoped it would not have been all!" he remarked; "I fancied that if you once spoke openly to one another——"

"Oh! we spoke very openly," said Regina, half laughing to drive back her tears.

"Miss Howard!" he said, "I know my cousin's wishes; you must forgive me if I share his disappointment. I have the regard of a brother for

Alban—I think, too, I know the world pretty well ; and if I had a sister, or a ward, in whom I felt deep interest,” he added, with his passing smile, “I hardly know another man in whose hands I could safely commit her destiny.”

“You make a great mistake,” she replied, eagerly ; “he took pains to let me know that he had no such views or wishes—he was more plain on the subject than was at all courteous or kind ! I really had not asked him to marry me, that he need have made such a declaration.”

“And therefore,” said Lord Oswestry, “it is clear to me that you have been doing nothing but misunderstand each other all along. You are two very bad people of business. Every thing should be transacted by deputy, as if you were crowned heads.”

“There is nothing to transact, fortunately,” she returned.

“What are you talking about—Henry ?” inquired Lady Oswestry, who had been taking off her bonnet, and settling her ribbons at the glass.

“No!” said Lord Oswestry, “we have not come to him yet.”

Regina could not any longer forbear giving them a slight sketch of Lord Henry’s style when under affliction, imitating Mrs. Shirley (who sate gently laughing behind her coffee-cups) and Lord Henry, alternately, until they none of them could laugh any more.

“But I wanted to tell you about this new man, Sir Ralph Willingham,” said Lady Oswestry, as she sipped her coffee; “he is such a wretch, you can’t think! Nobody visits him—Oh, no! my dear. Relations? I don’t believe he is a relation! Well, to be sure, if the son is, I suppose we cannot quite disown the father. Now, my lord, if you would not mind going back to the King’s Arms, or the Blue Dragon, or whatever you call your inn, to smoke your cigar, you could send up this little individual’s wardrobe, and the carriage at the same time, to convey me back, and, as soon as you are gone, we could enjoy a really nice gossip.”

Lord Oswestry laughed at the breadth of the hint, but acquiesced in it, and took a very cordial



leave of Miss Howard, asking her, at the same time, when they were to see her at Piermont.

“When you are quite alone,” she replied, with meaning.

“In October, then,” he said, replying to her idea. Mean time, Lord Exmoor having fallen asleep with his head on Regina’s knees, it was deemed advisable to put him to bed as they best could, and Mrs. Shirley performed this task by investing him with a long-frilled *peignoir* of her own, which he accepted passively, being in a torpid state, and so was disposed of to his mother’s satisfaction.

“I meant to have asked you to take him in,” she said, chafing her warm soft hands together in a manner peculiar to herself (how very differently people do rub their hands!) “I had no notion of taking him, unasked, to the super-excellent duchess. I know she is, my love, kind! all that is perfect! and wrote you affectionately on the loss in your house! well—didn’t I?”

“My dear Lady Oswestry, you were both far more kind than I deserved.”

“Not a grain—you bewitch every body! Do

you know that even my lord and I have been more—friendly—since you have lived with us? Some people seem to carry a good atmosphere about them—and, as for Exmoor, he actually was planning to run away to find you; only Mr. Best most fortunately met him, about two miles from home, and brought him back. Don't mention it to him, however, because it is all made up now, though his papa was very angry just at first."

"How frightened you must have been!"

"Oh! just a little pleasing excitement—life would be too dull without these occasional rubs. But I was going to tell you about Beyminstre. Regina!" she said suddenly, but very softly, "why don't you like Alban Willingham?"

"I can't tell you—it's too long," answered Regina, her eyes filling with tears; "but I have no mind to be the sport of any man, nor the dupe of any man—more than once in my life: he dares not laugh at me now!"

"My dear child! But why did you give him Beyminstre?"

"Only because I wanted to be rid of it—fancy

a young single woman shackled with such a property! I have every comfort—all I can wish for—with my present income. Don't you think I seem very well off here?"

"Every thing is charming—and such a dear old lady for a companion!"

"Well, now tell me about Sir Ralph—that will amuse me."

"Oh! but, first, I must mention I have seen his beautiful Mexican. My lord and I were going to dine with the Peachells—you remember—lived on the other side of Bradford, not far from the Falconers—Sir Ralph and his lady were on horseback, coming down the hill very slow—we were crawling up, and you know how we *do* crawl on those occasions."

Regina laughed, remembering Lord Oswestry's care of his horses.

"Oh! Regina, she is a beauty! The men say we are envious, but never where the beauty is genuine—we grow angry, I allow, now and then, at their horrible taste."

"It does astonish one, sometimes," said Regina.

“She wore a soft grey felt hat, set very forward, and shewing behind the splendid rolls of her purple hair—our dark brown hair is merely pretty in comparison. Black eyes, that glowed like lighted coals, and scarlet lips and cheeks relieving the pale olive of her oval face—slight mobile nostrils, and a haughty chin; and she carried her head rather forward, with a reckless, half-defiant look, betwixt an empress and a brigand’s wife.”

“I hope she domineers over the man who used his wife so ill.”

“They say he is her very slave. He never ventures to leave the house without asking leave, and returns to a moment at the hour she appoints. Sometimes she varies the monotony by throwing a plate at his head, or a cup of chocolate, which must be refreshing—but he bears all meekly, and generally gives her a handsome present after one of their scenes.”

“That is just as it should be,” said Regina; “and it is to this lady, I suppose, that he will leave his property?”

“No doubt he will, if they agree so long together. Mr. Reynard is constantly at the house, where of course hardly any good company goes. I must tell you, though, that your old admirer, Colonel St. Aix, is very often there. I leave you to judge his motive. Don't be jealous!”

“Sir Ralph is *not* married to her?”

“No—he says he was married once too often: when he has nothing else to do, he swears dreadfully at his son, and vows he shall never inherit a stick of his property—of which resolution you may be sure that Mr. Reynard takes a note. I have no doubt he hates poor Alban, as rogues always hate honest men.”

“And when does Mr. Willingham sail?”

“The first week in October. My lord has obtained for him a very good appointment. I wish I could interest you just a little in his fate—I am sure, whatever he did to offend you, must have been unintentional; for Oswestry says he is desperately in love.”

“I will give Lord Oswestry credit for knowing every thing but that.”

“And how long will you be troubled with the boy?”

“Let me have him, please, till I return to Holmwood.”

“How delighted he will be! Only, if he grows too noisy, write me word, and I will send for him. There’s the carriage—good-night, *ma toute belle*, and good-by!”

Regina enjoyed this visit of Lord Exmoor quite as much as he did himself. Although only a little boy, he was quite a sufficient escort in her rides, and their ponies were in requisition almost every day. They used to enjoy a row on the lake, these hot August evenings after their early tea, and the moonlight walk home no less, when Exmoor was always remarkably ready for his supper, and as ready afterwards to retire to the little chintz bedroom.

Mrs. Shirley used to say he was “as good as gold,” which may be said of most children when they are by themselves; he never wanted to make a noise, never broke windows, and, being in the midst of a very dry summer, never came in with dirty feet. Regina heard him his Latin grammar



after breakfast, and he sat very still while she and Mrs. Shirley read the Psalms; morning and evening, with which exercise his intellectual labours were ended for the day.

But, when the sight-seeing was pretty well exhausted, Regina longed to be quietly settled at Holmwood. There was her home—there ought to be her duties—her poor people—her plans of usefulness carried out.

She parted very sorrowfully from her little friend, Lord Exmoor, who was going at once to Eton, and betook herself, with Mrs. Shirley, to her old house on the common.

It was her faithful servant, Becky Haliday, who first remarked that Miss Howard didn't seem at all like her real self. She accepted to a certain extent the explanation, that Regina had suffered a good deal since they were all together with her “dear old missus”—but, with a shrewdness that may often be found in her class, she persisted that she knew the look of a trouble that was past and gone, and that she was certain sure Miss Gina had something on her mind. She supposed all young ladies had,

for that matter. Dixon, the groom, with equal profundity, asserted that though he didn't ought not to say nothing about nobody as came to the house when they was up yonder; yet he could not say that there was not as handsome a young lord as you ever set eyes on, and as fine a figure of a man, coming and going, and every one know'd he was after Miss Howard; so, he supposed, they should hear of a wedding before long. Mariane said "Lor!" and asked the colour of the young man's hair with deep emotion; while the more solid Becky said she didn't want no lords—she didn't care if her missus never went out of the parish! There was Mr. Brand, a fine preacher and a true friend, and she always had stood out (she, Becky,) that she was very partial to the church.

One of the many things that surprised Regina, about this time, and she began to think that her life was to be made up of surprises, was a letter she received from Sir Ralph Willingham, informing her that he could not forget it was to her disinterested conduct he owed his present fortune—that he had ascribed to her a motive which, time had

proved, was quite opposed to her real one—that the living of Beyminstre, worth eleven hundred a year, was likely to be vacant in the course of a few days—that ladies had always some favourite in the clerical profession—and that it would give him pleasure if she would nominate the successor of the present incumbent, at her earliest convenience.

Of course she thought directly of Mr. Brand, and even committed the *grave inconvenience* of sending Mariane down to the little front gate to stop him as he was going past, and beg him to walk in for a few minutes; the very thing she allowed, half laughing to herself, that she had so despised Winny Hopper for doing, over and over again.

He came in, and was very much astonished and very much obliged—more so by the truly kind interest Miss Howard took in his prospects, as he told her, than even by a transition to a lot which he could never have expected to fall to his share during his whole life.

To change the subject, Regina asked him where he was going. He replied, looking grave, he was

just going to spend a few minutes with poor Miss Hopper—he thought her very low; her spirits were sadly depressed at times.

Regina tried to look as if she believed this; but, not quite succeeding in the right expression, Mr. Brand gently pointed out that people, not altogether agreeable, were yet capable of feeling and suffering very acutely: “Now to give you an instance of this,” he said, “Miss Hopper mentioned to me that she chose the Lakes for her little recent tour, because she had never been there with her *mother*! and, therefore, the place would revive no painful associations.”

Regina could not forget that it had been an understood meeting between her and Lord Henry; but, she thought if Miss Hopper chose to put another colour on her actions, it was not for her to undeceive their little world: so she merely said, “Really, we cannot be too careful not to form a hasty judgment of people.”

But now that Mr. Brand was a rector, and of so good a living, Winny came back to her allegiance, and pursued him every where.

She forgot Lord Henry as soon as she was sure he had forgotten her, and the Church and the Sunday school rose directly in the scale.

She thwarted Regina about some pinafores, and entered into a long correspondence with her on the subject of Chinese tape; and she had the art of protracting a case that would do honour to a Chancery barrister. Indeed, the tape controversy never came to an end; for, at about the thirteenth bulletin, Regina received her expected summons to Piermont. She knew it would be so; yet every pulse throbbed as she read the lines—

“We have had Alban Willingham here, for a few days—he left us yesterday, and his ship sails this morning. I hate farewells!

“VIOLET OSWESTRY.”

He was gone, then! the letter was dated the first of the month—this was the second. Mrs. Shirley found her in tears, which she could not readily explain, but said she was worried to death with all this talking about the Chinese tape.



She was received by the Oswestrys with their usual kindness. They were not alone by any means; for parties of friends were coming and going, and the house was full of gentlemen for the pheasant-shooting, which was just beginning. But Regina knew that she had been understood, and that they had waited for her till the person she dreaded to meet was far away. She often thought over, till she was weary of the words, every thing she had said in her last meeting with Alban Willingham. She might have been less angry, and she devoutly wished she had; but the interview must have ended as it did—there was not one word from him which gave an opening for a reconciliation. He wished to part in peace, but, no less—*to part!* Often, when the drawing-room was crowded with groups of people, laughing, talking, singing—sometimes, even when she herself was at the piano, these thoughts would pursue her, and lend a deeper pathos to her voice, a softer expression to her beautiful face. She was more admired than ever—but she had no new lovers, because men seldom love what is spiritual,



and never a woman who is quite uninterested in them. It did not amuse Regina to flirt, and Lady Oswestry often bantered her about her coldness, and said she was waiting for Lord Ellesdon's return.

She was laughing at this worn-out supposition one morning, as they were filling the flower-jars together in her own sitting-room, when Lord Oswestry came in to ask his lady some trifling question.

"Invite the Lawlers? certainly, I will; I ought to have thought of them before. You know, my dear, that your constant swain is married?"

"Who is the lady?" asked Regina, hardly looking up from the jar she was adorning with fuschias.

"One of those sweet girls you met here last year, who used to make hop sacks for poor babies; I don't recollect which. Are you sorry? I remember I was dreadfully shocked when the first man I refused—married. I expected him to turn Carthusian, I suppose! But she does not care! Her thoughts are far away—on the shores of the Nile. Ah! it is a wonderful country, Egypt!"

Regina, who was just speculating as to whether Alban had reached Alexandria, blushed crimson, to her great distress; but, happily, Lady Oswestry had turned to her Davenport, to scribble her invitation, and Lord Oswestry was leaning on the mantelpiece absorbed in his own thoughts.

At last he said gravely—"The plague is in Egypt."

"The plague!" cried Lady Oswestry.

Regina gasped for breath.

"Well, but the plague is always in Egypt," she added.

"Not as it is now," said Lord Oswestry; "it appears in its worst form every few years, but they have not had it so bad at Cairo for half a century."

"Oh! the poor duchess—she will go wild!" cried Lady Oswestry.

"I confess," remarked Lord Oswestry, "I was thinking of my own concerns. Alban is at Cairo."

"Oh, dear! then you had better write off, and tell him not to be obstinate, but to leave at once:

I know he meant to stay a few weeks there, for the sake of learning Arabic."

"The mischief would be done before he could receive a letter," said Lord Oswestry.

"Well, but there's no harm in writing—tell him to go straight on to Jaffa—he will get it in a fortnight."

"A fortnight! the town will be decimated in half that time," said Lord Oswestry, impatiently.

"But the English never catch it, hardly," urged Lady Oswestry.

"Hardly—as you say," he returned.

"I'll write myself!" she exclaimed; "I'll tell him it is folly to linger in the country under such circumstances."

"I don't believe he cares what becomes of him," said Lord Oswestry, as he left the room.

Lady Oswestry took out a sheet of thin paper, and then, for the first time, looking at Regina, said archly—"Whose fault is that?"

Regina had great self-command—nobody would have guessed all she had been feeling the last few minutes. Nobody could have read in her face

that her first wild idea had been to throw herself into the next train, and get somehow, by one swift conveyance or other, to Cairo, to Alban!—to get him out of the danger if she could, and, if too late, to claim her privilege to nurse him, to be with him to the last—and then die! She went on selecting her flowers, and clipping the stalks as before; but Lady Oswestry was startled to see the ghastly whiteness of her face—her features sharpened as if by a sudden spasm.

“My dear child! I was only jesting,” she cried; “you have nothing to reproach yourself with—I wish I had as little! But I am sure you would not wish him to be such a heathen as to stay at Cairo now.”

“No!” said Regina, just audibly. She still went on altering and arranging her nosegay, as if in a dream. Lady Oswestry sat touching her lips with her agate pen, and looking down on the blank sheet of paper before her.

“Won’t you write?” said Regina at last.

“Oh! true! and the post—that will be soon going out;” and her ladyship turned and folded

her paper, and shook it out, and squared it, and then gazed down upon it as before.

“I don’t know how it is, but I never did write to him before—and I don’t know what tone to take,” said her ladyship, leaning her head on her hand in a desponding attitude.

“If you catch the post to-day, you will catch the bi-monthly mail,” said Regina, in a low earnest tone, her fingers trembling like Mdlle. Rachel’s in a storm.

“I know! that’s what I was thinking,” remarked her ladyship in a crying tone: “I do wish, Regina, that you would be a really kind friend and write for me—I can’t tell *what* to say.”

A knock at the door—my lady’s own man come to ask for the letters. There was still five minutes to spare.

Regina snatched the pen, and wrote off the following lines—

“Lady Oswestry bids me write, and gives me no time to think or choose how to address you. She entreats you to leave Cairo at once, and not

waste a life which is not yours to throw away. If any thing I have ever said or done, helps to make you careless of your present danger, which I do not believe, I wish it undone, unsaid. May God protect you through what we cannot avert !

“ REGINA HOWARD.”

Lady Oswestry, mean time, had rushed into her lord's study with a face radiant with glee.

“ I am a graceless hypocrite !” she exclaimed ;  
“ but no matter—I have made her write to him at last !”



## CHAPTER XIII.

NOBODY on earth could behave better than Lady Oswestry, when she came back in time to direct the folded epistle, and deliver it to the servant for the post. She was so grateful, so sorry for the trouble, "not that it was any trouble to such a little Sévigné to write upon any subject," that Regina little suspected how she was triumphing in her heart. If she had, I think she would have ordered horses, and been off to Holmwood within the hour.

It was settled that she was to remain at Piermont till Christmas. She knew that her society was really valued, and that she was in no danger of outstaying her welcome with either the master or the mistress of the house. Often, when they had a crowd of company staying there, Lady Os-

westry would come into Regina's dressing-room before dinner, and throwing herself back in an easy chair, exclaim, "You are the only friend, Regina, I have in the house!"

But, just now, she longed for the quiet of her own home, where she might have been dull, and absent, and dispirited, without exciting any remark.

For it was a weary time of waiting. All she had ever felt for Alban came back now, when she knew him to be in danger—she had never loved him so well before! She upbraided herself, constantly, for her coldness when they had been together at Piermont—she recollected a hundred little circumstances which might have led to an explanation, had she chosen to notice them at the time! She did herself injustice; but her heart was softened towards him, as it often does when it is too late. Then she was annoyed because she thought Lord Oswestry watched her—she so frequently caught his eye fixed upon her. This was the fact; for he often remarked to his wife that he was distressed to see Miss Howard growing so pale and thin.

One evening Lady Clara, playing with her, said—

“I could blow you away, you are so light!”

And Lord Oswestry gave her a long, compassionate look. She chafed under it, as she had never done before, and, turning quickly round, said—“Well! both my parents died of consumption; I have a right, if any one has, to be thin.”

“But not a right to walk for hours in a heavy fog, as you did to-day,” he said, kindly.

She could not answer this—she could not say to him that she felt as if she must either walk or die—so parched was she with the fever of suspense.

But, as he watched her, so did she study his countenance every time they met after an absence of a few hours; fearing, more than hoping, that he might have heard something since he saw her last.

They were in November. One morning Lady Oswestry was calculating, “He must have received the letter on such a day—if——”

The *if* seemed to send a cold steel through Regina’s heart. She thought, as she often did, *if* all was over, should she ever feel at rest again?

Lady Oswestry was making the breakfast (she often remembered that morning), and was finding fault with some arrangement on the sideboard, when her lord entered. They were quite alone. He stood abstractedly on the hearth-rug, without speaking. Regina cast a frightened look at his face. She saw something was the matter; and it seemed as if all her pulses stopped at once.

“Well, good people, when do you mean to begin breakfast?” asked Lady Oswestry, as soon as she had poured out the tea.

Lord Oswestry did not hear her. “A very shocking thing has happened, Violet,” he said; “I heard of it only this morning—poor Willingham!”

Regina fell from her chair.

Now if she had, to use an Irish expression, been in possession of her senses when she fainted away, she would have almost died of shame—she who had disguised her anxiety, her misery, so long and so well, only to betray her feelings like a school-girl at the eleventh hour! But she could control her nerves, her features, every thing but her health—

and nothing shook her health like a long-protracted suspense.

“Poor child—don’t tell her!” whispered Lady Oswestry, imploringly, as Regina opened her eyes with a dim vague look around.

“On the contrary—tell her by all means!” returned her lord. “Why, my dear Miss Howard, you startled us in the midst of my story—the room was too hot—I was just telling Lady Oswestry about our neighbour, Sir Ralph Willingham. It is really a dreadful thing! He was found last night, in his own room—shot through the heart.”

“Sir Ralph Willingham!” cried Lady Oswestry, half pleased, half indignant—“what on earth possessed you to begin your story with ‘poor Willingham?’”

Regina’s pale cheek began to be tinged with carmine; it was exactly her own thought.

“On my word, you ladies are very unfeeling!” said Lord Oswestry, lightly. “Here is an unfortunate man found lying on the floor of his room, with a ball through his heart, and you are surprised that I mention him as ‘Poor Willingham!’ not to



count that, on that very evening, he had been deserted by his beautiful Mexican, who had eloped with Colonel St. Aix a few hours previously."

"Oh! then, that was the cause of his suicide, I conclude!" remarked Lady Oswestry.

"Most likely," returned her lord. "Of course, the servants say that Colonel St. Aix murdered Sir Ralph, in order to run off with his lady—and I believe the police are in search of him; but you know that servants never will accept a simple fact as it stands."

"Well, now—*did* he make a will?" inquired; Lady Oswestry.

"Ah! that remains to be proved," he replied; "if he did not, what a capital thing for Alban!"

"I think the chances are in his favour; because Mr. Reynard, who was in the house at the time, instantly sent off a despatch for Sir Alban Willingham—now, I don't think he would have taken that trouble for any one but the heir."

"But all this time, dear child, how do you find yourself?" asked Lady Oswestry, turning to Regina.



“Quite restored, dear Lady Oswestry; but indeed the room was very hot.”

“It must have been,” returned her ladyship, with meaning; “and now, *will* any body have any breakfast—for the second time of asking?”

Regina could scarcely bend her thoughts to any thing—she could only feel. Alban might have Beyminstre at last, if—but that if haunted her. Lord Oswestry could not hear any more news from Beyminstre during that day. On the next, the report was that Colonel St. Aix and his companion had been discovered, apprehended, examined, and acquitted, all in a breath, after receiving a very long moral lecture from the magistrate, which we will hope might do them some future good. Lady Oswestry grew impatient.

“If we were to ride over to Bradford, my lord,” she said, the next day after luncheon, “we could call upon your solicitors (by accident), and see if we could pick up any thing. I hate being in the dark. Old Quillet is an awful gossip; and I will bet you any thing I come home as well informed .

upon the Willingham case as Mr. Reynard himself."

This was agreed to—Lord Oswestry was to accompany his lady, and Regina was desired by her ladyship to keep up her spirits until they came back, which would not be until near dinner-time.

She was never sorry to be left alone. She liked society, and really valued the company of her hostess; but these pauses were almost essential to her life.

She went into Lady Oswestry's morning room, and as the daylight waned, and it became too dusk to read, she sat down to the small cottage piano, and soothed her restless feelings with Mozart's Twelfth Mass. As her fingers wandered into the *Et Incarnatus*, how distinctly there rose before her the little Holmwood drawing-room, with the beautiful Mrs. Willingham singing that movement with herself and Mr. Brand, and her dear grandmother sitting in her fireside chair, listening and approving, and sometimes playing chess with Alban! She rose from the instrument with her face bathed in tears, and sat down on the

hearth-rug to warm her hands—a favourite posture of hers.

As she sate there, she heard Lord Oswestry's footstep coming up-stairs, and presently he entered the room.

“Are you come back?” she asked, looking up. “It is so dark I can hardly see you. But where is my lady?”

“Not come in yet,” he said coming close to her.

“I have not kept a very good fire, but I have been playing till just now,” she said in her unsteady voice, that betrayed recent tears.

He did not answer.

She rose up suddenly, as if moved by a spring, and said, “Lord Oswestry, you have heard bad news—tell me at once, and then it will be over!”

To her breathless astonishment, she found herself suddenly clasped in the arms of her sober host, while a voice like his exclaimed—“Regina! do you not know me?”

“Oh! Alban, is it you?—is it you?” she cried, and, dizzy with the shock, she leaned against him.

“And did you really write me this, Regina?”

he asked, drawing from his bosom a folded paper —“ I have been dreaming so these three weeks ; and lived upon the dream.”

She took the letter and opened it, and the firelight glimmered through it like a lattice : it had been perforated all over for fumigation.

“ I should not wonder—I dare say I did—it feels like foreign paper,” she replied.

“ I thought, if you had cared nothing for me, you would never have written,” he said ; “ so, when it reached me, I started at once for England.”

“ Oh ! your appointment——,” said Regina.

“ I met the governor at Alexandria on his road out, and told him I was recalled on urgent private affairs—he kindly said he would keep my post open for me till Christmas.”

She recollected at that moment the dreadful scene that had lately taken place at Beyminstre, and felt that she could not be the one to tell him —she gave him the letter back, and sat down, sick at heart.

“ Yes ! I know it,” he said, answering her thought ; “ I saw the papers at Southampton—I

was shocked beyond measure; but I cannot affect any other feeling on the subject. Now, Regina, my prospects are all uncertain—I may have to return to India—I may be able to offer you the lot I once hoped would be mine; but will you take me as I am—with or without Beyminstre?”

“I did that, Alban, long ago,” she said, holding out her hand.

“It need not surprise me,” he said, after a pause; “it is nothing strange to find you better, nobler, truer, than I have been—I am a wretch unworthy of pardon!”

“How was it?” asked Regina.

“You did not write, and I fancied—I hate to go back to the past—you know when I received dear Mrs. Arnold’s letter?”

“But when we met——”

“Oh! what a time of misery that was—how often have I tried to make you speak, if it were only to reproach me! Sometimes, even, I have said things that you might have interpreted as bearing a double meaning; and then I have seen you start, and there has come over your beautiful

face a tranquil expression as if you said—  
‘Patience!’”

“The very word I repeated to myself a hundred times!” said Regina.

“When that woman Hopper has talked at you, and accused you of craft and meanness, I longed to say to you—I do not believe that—my pride has been injured—I cannot come, a beggar, to sue at the feet of the rich heiress—but I know you are pure as the light of heaven; and I have tried to catch your eye, and express all this in a look—but you have never let me.”

“How can you talk so? Why call yourself a beggar?” said Regina. “Is, then, an ancient name, a great descent, become nothing in your eyes? or a high character and standing in the world? If you use such words I shall think you very much gone off,” she added, smiling.

“Every thought that you have is high-born,” he returned.

“It is very odd—Lord Oswestry once said that to me!” she exclaimed. “But you are so like him—I took you for him just now, you



know; and, very often, I used to take him for you."

"Ah!" said Alban—a new light seemed to break in upon him—"I cannot describe what that man has sometimes made me suffer. I felt so sure that he was gaining an influence over you, unsuspected by yourself."

"I can hardly forgive that," said Regina, smiling. "Really, Lady Oswestry is not a myth, nor the shadow of a shade, that I should forget her existence; and I had, thank you, been brought up to consider my duty to my neighbour."

"At present you are only the shadow of a shade," returned Alban; "I should like very much to see you again Regina."

The fire had burned so low that they were almost in darkness. She lit the branches on the mantelpiece, and turned half towards him in a posture to delight a sculptor, the lights behind her giving that dim radiance to her whole outline, which he had associated always with her memory since their moonlight walk.

“Oh, Peri!” he said, advancing to her, “you shall never escape me again!”

“There are the Oswestrys!” cried Regina.  
“*le veritable Amphytrion*, this time!”

They came in together, and, for a few minutes, there was nothing but exclamations and inquiries. He could not possibly have heard the news? No—not till he reached England. Dear! Lady Oswestry could not think how it came about—it never was her little bit of a letter—which she did not even write herself—that had such a powerful effect on his movements, was it?—Well, from that day Sir Alban was her knight, and might wear her colours whenever he pleased, and if my lord liked to be jealous, let him! And Regina, was not she surprised? Fancy her having to stay, poor child, and entertain him, as no doubt she did, from civility, when it must have been the greatest bore in the world to both parties!

She made them all laugh; and then she became serious, after her fashion.

“Somebody owes me some money—who is it? I laid a bet this morning that I would get all the

information I wanted from Thomas Quillet, Esq., gentleman."

"You laid a bet which nobody took, my dear Violet," said Lord Oswestry, quietly.

"Did I? I'm sorry, because money is always *an object*, as Mrs. Chillingworth says. However, Sir Alban, my information concerns you, and I am delighted to be the first to congratulate you upon it. Sir Ralph left no will; and, therefore, Beyminstre is yours!"

"And yours!" said Alban, turning to Regina.

\* \* \* \* \*

At this moment, Winny Hopper is the most popular person in the county of Kent. Every body believes in her, except Sir Alban and Lady Willingham. I don't count the Oswestrys, because by this time they have quite forgotten her existence; and I must say that, although Mr. Brand thinks her on the whole a worthy creature, she has lately been rather a thorn in his side. You

see he is now very handsomely off, and his rectory, built out of a fragment of the old priory, is one of the lions of the neighbourhood. He could keep a carriage if he liked, and there he is, a single man still—such a waste! Winny has several times driven over to church, at Beyminstre, to hear Mr. Brand preach, and cried and smiled like April all the time; because, though the curate of Holmwood is as good a man as ever wore a stole, yet she *can* NOT accustom herself to do without his sermons, she tells Mr. Brand; and so she gets up at six o'clock, and drives in her little chaise all across the country, twenty-eight miles, to hear one of his *beautiful* discourses; and never minds the poor horse, who might expect to rest a little on that day if he lived with a reasonable mistress. It is flattering, and, as Mr. Brand said, what could he do but ask her in to luncheon? Only the last time, as he was showing her his greenhouse, between the services, she really did so very nearly make him an offer, that he grew uncomfortable, and walked across to the House to consult Lady Willingham. Because, he said, though Miss

Hopper was not young, people would talk, as he was a single man, and he had no intention of changing his condition.

Regina was extremely amused ; and desired Mr. Brand to consider himself always invited to luncheon at Beyminstre on Sunday. Then, she said, Miss Hopper will be left to the society of your butler, if she still persists in forcing your doors ; and she will soon drop her visits.

It happened exactly so, and now Winny is spreading her nets for the young curate of Holmwood, who has not yet entered into priest's orders.

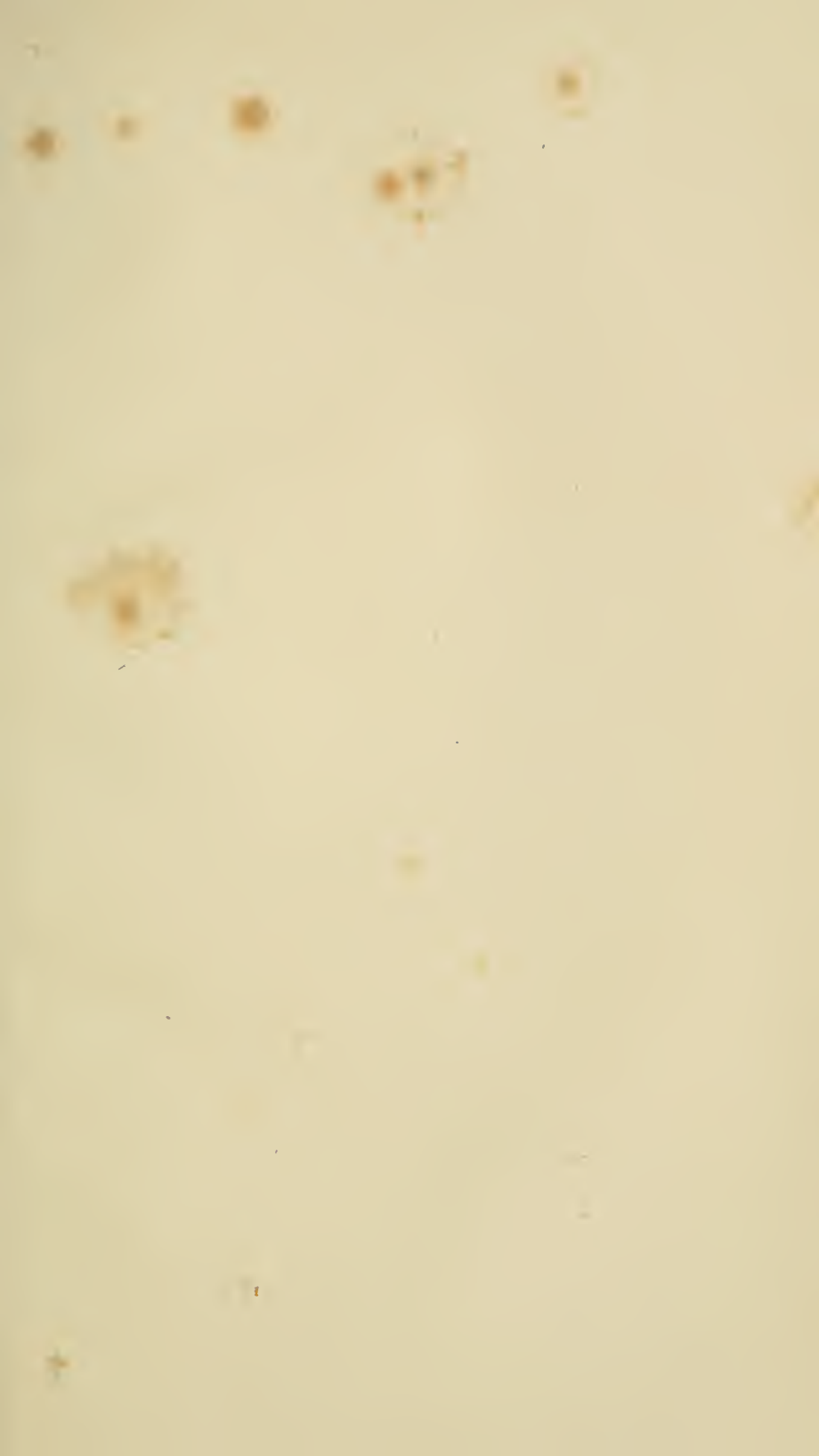
Regina has not forgotten Mrs. Shirley, whom she has installed at Beyminstre as housekeeper. The Duchess of Clareville wrote to her very affectionately upon her marriage, and said that, although she would have gladly formed other projects for her young friend's establishment, she had very early learned to lay them aside, for she had long seen how Regina's heart was occupied. The good Winters are always very welcome guests to the Willinghams—old Mr. Winter some-

times tells Regina, laughing, that “the mischief was done” at his concert years ago: but he often adds that “if you wish to see a couple really happy themselves, and earnestly desirous to spread happiness around them, you must go and look for them at Beyminstre!”

THE END.











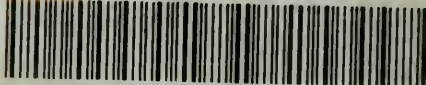








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